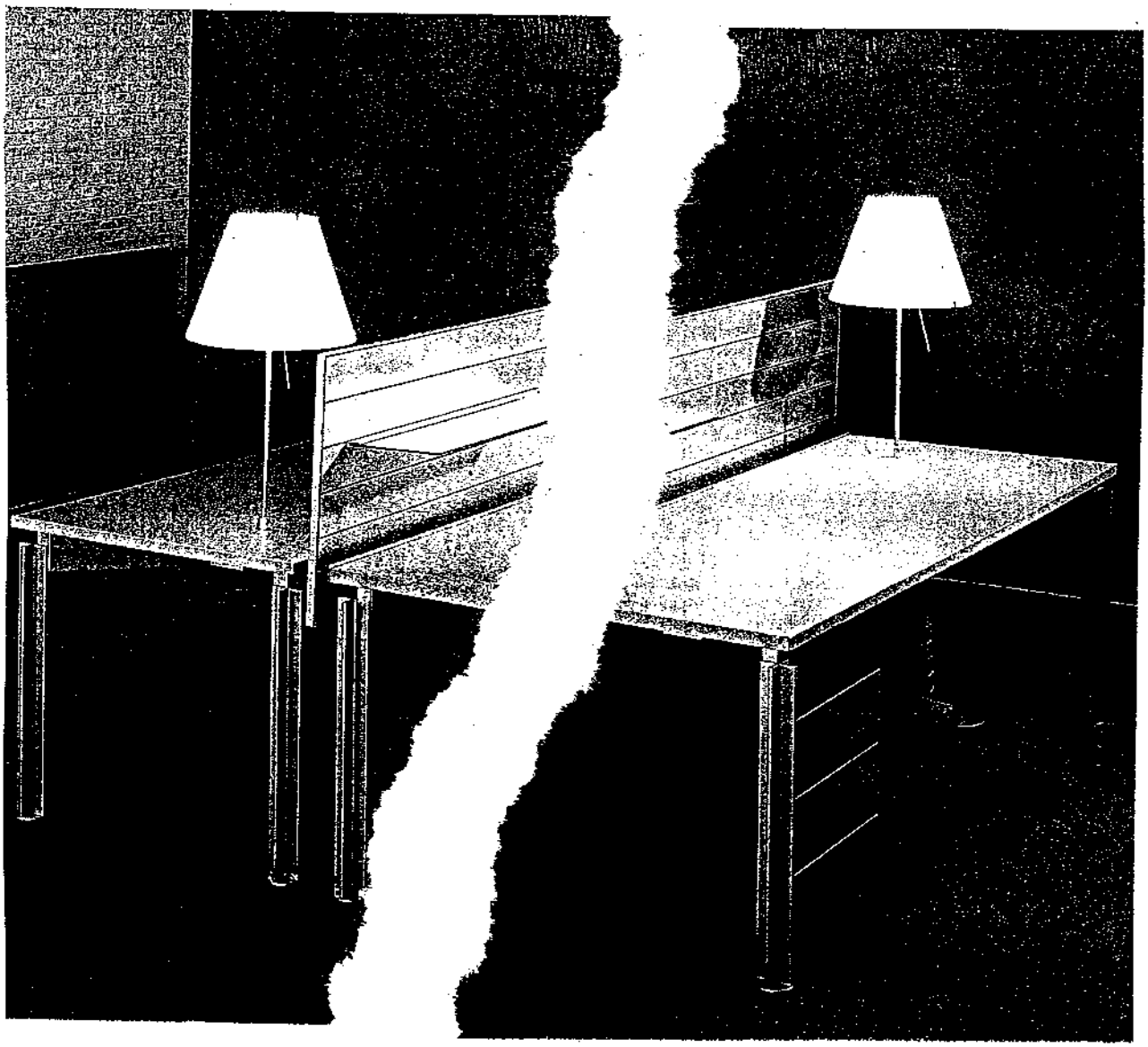
COMMUNIST HEADACHE



NOTES FOR WORKING AND LIVING : Vol 5.

COMMUNIST HEADACHE

NOTES FOR WORKING AND LIVING VOL. 5

AUTUMN 1996

CONTENTS:

Our notes for working and living represent our efforts to develop a radical methodology for examining this society, and our own observations and recommendations when we apply this methodology to various aspects of the capitalist system.

We are only a small group, and have put out these first three volumes in a hope to engage in some critical debate and to further the revolutionary cause. Communist Headache does not exist as some formal organisation. If we manage to stir some revolutionaries from their various slumbers then we will consider this intial stage as successful. Needless to say we offer no blueprints and our analyses are far from flawless.

Contrary to unpopular disbelief the last issue of Headache was not the final one. It only achieved to take threads of ideas and contradictions and offer less ideas and more contradictions. Oh yeah, it also lost me all my friends. Never mind. The documents in this issue offer little new in terms of a theoretical progression, though taken as a whole the issue could possibly provide some scope for considering workplace struggle. I have been putting my energies into a new project that is more immediately engaged with the cultural environment (thus it has a different 'sales pitch' etc). For those interested it is available for £3 + £1 postage from my NEW PO Box. In terms of Headache and my wranglings with marxism, revolutionary character armour, class struggle, psychological malnourishment, etc, then I will be relaunching a second series next year. In the meantime (if anyone's listening?) I appreciate discussion, debate or insults from any articles printed in Headaches 1-5.

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In volume 1 :
- New struggles in an Old Framework
- Some Questions for the Anarchist Movement
- Workplace Struggle vs Community Struggle

volume 2 :
- Postmodernism vs Class Struggle
- Our Contribution to the Animals Debate
- Libraries and journalists on strike
- Violence and Adrenalin

volume 3 :
- Middle Class Struggle
- Punk Rock Demystified
- Crime and Community
- Information Society

WORK, WORKERS, WHY WORK, ZERO WORKERS

What follows are various documents discussing the idea of work. Due to the fact that the working class come into 'being' around the workplace, then so does class theory and ideology become centred around the workplace - though it is necessary to go well back into the marxist project to examine this situation in terms of its genealogy and opposition (see my brief attempt in Communist Headache #1). The idea of work, workplace struggle, workplace misery, true community and creativity etc form an axis for the material printed so far in Headaches #1-4 - these further essays and reprints help to focus the questions without focusing on a particular answer. I am just searching for possibilities and perhaps previously unseen ways of pushing our struggle forwards - ways of looking at the physical and mental working environments from a working class point of view.

The fictional piece 'Never Work Ever' is really just a set of contradictions pulled to their limits in the realm of fiction. Unfortunately the backbone of the story was based upon a true event, and this backbone reflects a current problem within the struggle against the Job Seekers Allowance - ie how to deal with particularly malignant elements of the benefits staff. This problem is returned to later.

From the point of view of including a work of fiction as a tool for class struggle it is convenient to discuss the article on Bukowski. Here is one of the best, accessible and humorous writers who reflect upon the working class condition - both the physical factory floor and the mental mindset of 'proletarianisation'. The reprinted article on Bukowski is also useful because it suggests a short cut to gaining the knowledge of (Negri-ist) Autonomist theory... I mean, if 'Marx Beyond Marx' was just about the banality of work then why didn't they say so in the first place? Maybe some of our autonomist readers could provide a commentary on the article...

The article 'Easy Listening For The Hard Of Hearing' was written on request for a library workers journal, so maybe this puts it in a better context. The general theme was to show how our work could relate to a future communist society in terms of giving us the willpower to do things for ourselves in a way that is meaningful and under our control. Obviously such a tactic is limited on its own (it can end up advocating 'socially useful production' as a revolutionary process) but it is useful to contrast it to the syndicalist approach (eg a recent call for a 4-hour work day, what I want is a 24-hour work day!).

The reprints from Processed World Magazine are things that I have been trying to get into circulation for some time. Processed World doesn't get much circulation because it can appear hip and expensive, and indeed certain issues tend to be clustered around a theme and so can attract a lot of 'filler' articles. The 3 articles I reprint are all worth reading, though a critique of them would be necessary - I am not going to do this now as I am compiling this volume with a broken leg and a broken foot and deep arguments about the reformist nature of Gorzian ideology is the least of my worries! Of course a larger critique of the whole Processed World project exists courtesy of Bob Black, but the volume of insults this has generated is typical of large parts of the North American anarchist milieu with its tendency to delve into topics like transgenerational sex, breakdown of monogamy, spiritual correctness, etc.

The final reprint is an article submitted to me by a member of Bristol Marxist Forum who had read my article 'How The Other Half Lives' in CH#3. I am printing it because it is a useful article written in an upfront and humorous style. It doesn't pretend to have the perfect answer, and perhaps all we can gain from it is that we must be careful when taking a particular analytical tool (ie marxist economic theory) and applying it in isolation.

There are a couple more things to be mentioned. I received the 'Industrial' section of a 'Tactics and Strategies' discussion document circulated by an anarchist group. Some of the ideas seemed to acknowledge (and attempt to transgress) the limitations that were brought up in the last issue of Headache ('Wage Demands...' article). It bases a discussion on the grounds that work is exploitation and exploitation produces misery - and so tactics and roles for revolutionaries are countered with discussion on the moods, natures and relationships that are fostered in a place where people are exploited. Thus it tackles syndicalism and unionism from a slightly different angle : the idea of workplace resistance groups is floated around such that we need to be clear what 'anti-union' actually means. Just because it is against something negative does not mean it is necessarily positive - that more we think in terms of consciously not calling ourselves a union the more we frame the dynamics of struggle at work in terms of how a union would see it. This demands that we take a step back, and talk of a need to communicate and instigate collective reappropriation of time and resources are always good points to develop.

Some of these pressing problems have been brought to a head with the struggle against the JSA. The implementation of '3 Strikes and Your Out' has been accused of dividing workers, while the workers union, the CPSA, has framed its contribution to the struggle by arguing for more screens to protect 'workers' from psychotic 'claimants'. The media has escalated possible unity by saying that all dole offices are having JSA celebratory parties (when what happened was that funds were given for this), and there has also been evidence of staff being randomly photographed by what has been assumed to be saboteurs. Yes, there are malicious workers in the Benefits Agency who victimise claimants, and they need to be given all they deserve by fellow staff and outsiders. At best their activity amounts to little more than securing a better position in a new regime.

WORK, REFUSAL OF WORK AND THE JOB IN *POST OFFICE* AND *FACTOTUM*

> The only human essence of labor which approximates to the concreteness of capital is the refusal of work.[1]
>
> Toni Negri

1

No contemporary American novelist has treated work as extensively or intensively as Bukowski. The salient characteristic of Bukowski's first two novels is their focus on work. Indeed, Bukowski's outstanding achievement is his depiction of work, most notably in *Post Office* (1971) and *Factotum* (1975). Moreover, the latter marks a turning-point in the treatment of work in the American novel.

For ideological reasons work has not been a popular topic in contemporary American fiction, when compared, for example, with its place in writing from the former socialist bloc or in earlier periods of American literature; there, indeed, its treatment had often been connected with writing sympathetic to leftist politics. The socialist writers of the turn of the century dealt with work as their treatment of it formed part of an engagement on behalf of the working class. Novels such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1907), Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908) and *Martin Eden* (1909) and his autobiography, *John Barleycorn* (1913), and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and *An American Tragedy* (1925) provide vivid images of work, but the focus is never work per se. Later, Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933) is moving in its depiction of exploited workers and the unemployed during the early stages of the Depression. But it is a *Tendenzroman*: the reader feels the novel progressing towards an overtly political resolution and the hero's joining the Communist Party as an organizer, the "conversion ending," seems somewhat pat. Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty* is an impressive novel but focuses on a strike, a moment of no work, as does John Steinbeck's better known *In Dubious Battle*. Perhaps Edward Dahlberg's *Bottom Dogs* (1930) comes closest in mood to *Factotum*, but work is not the primary focus. Harvey Swados' novelistic collection of stories, *On the Line* (1957), though marked in the Eisenhower 50s for its interest in work—specifically alienated assembly-line work—and remarkable for that alone, also evades important issues and ends in a mild apotheosis of the union. This brief summary does not, of course, do justice to the many American novels written in this century that do treat work in some fashion.

Bukowski, however, while not consciously a proletarian or engaged novelist, has yet managed to do more towards fulfilling leftist theory as concerns the role of the novelist in bourgeois society than have more committed novelists, "dispelling," in the words of Engels' well-known letter to Minna Kautsky about such fiction, "the dominant conventional illusions concerning [real] relations." He has done this by changing the focus of the discussion. Because the novels from the turn of the century through the 1950s treating such subject matter were often *Tendenz* novels, the content was openly linked to a political tendency, ranging from Conroy's Marxist-Leninist Communism to Swados' left-liberalism. Yet Bukowski, uncommitted and "apolitical" as he was, depicted alienated labor and sketched a mode of working-class resistance in ways having much in common with contemporaneous New Left analyses.

Post Office and *Factotum* represent an important change in novels treating work and working-class experience. They reflect the changes that American society had undergone since the Second World War—they have as their context an American working-class life from 1940 to 1970—and also reflect the events of the 1960s and early 1970s. Both of these facts are important; without the events of the 1960s the material might well have ended up—if it had ended up being written (and published) at all—as something like *On the Line*. On the other hand, without the context—the jobs—of those three decades and without the three decades of jobs, the result might have been something like the writing of, for example, Raymond Carver.

What is different about these novels is their relentlessly negative depiction of all aspects of work and a fundamental questioning of its usefulness. While previous writers did not glorify work, it was seen as necessary. What was wrong was that the worker was being exploited: either he was being worked too hard, or he wasn't being paid enough, or both, but the necessity of the work itself was never questioned. This was true of the early socialist novels as well as of the proletarian novelists of the 1930s. In Swados' novel there is the beginning of an attitude that is most clearly presented in Bukowski: that there is no way such work is anything but degrading and an assembly-line worker is never going to be "middle-class." In other respects, however, *On the Line* was a last vestige of the 1930s rather than a sign of things to come, whereas Bukowski's novels represent an important change. Nor were they merely an isolated individual response, but rather reflections of historic socio-economic developments taking place in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (the culmination of events that had begun earlier in American history) as well as of more recent twentieth-century technological developments. Bukowski's response to such developments was something quite different from that of any previous writer. His refusal of work (for such it is) is an implicit call for its abolition. Radical as such a demand seems, he was by no means alone in making it.

2

Bukowski's representation of work can easily be viewed as merely the subjective, indeed, idiosyncratic, response of a dissatisfied and disgruntled individual. This, however, is not the case. But in order to show how historically determined his attitude to and representation of work are, it will be necessary to prepare with some thoroughness the socio-historical foundation for my discussion of the novels. Some of this analysis may strike the reader as alien, indeed alienating. Yet if Bukowski's real and substantial achievement is to be fully appreciated, such spadework has to be done.

As far back as the middle of the 19th century there had been a movement in the United States to reduce the working day in response to the increased intensity of work in industrializing capitalism, to take at least some of the benefit of increased American technological efficiency in the form of shorter hours, as well as in higher wages (as opposed to taking it solely in the form of the latter). The movement fluctuated for a century but continued making progress into the 1930s and through the early days of Roosevelt's New Deal. But with Roosevelt's opting for full employment, or at least increased employment, what had been a real movement towards reduced work was defeated.[2]

The sharp fall in hours worked per week that took place in the first quarter of the 20th century was due to a factor unique to American capitalism: its intensive mechanization. The historian Gabriel Kolko has written:

> there is no question that American capitalism developed within the context of a quite distinctive technology unlike that of Western Europe, and this in turn both created and built upon a no less diverse and unique working class. Capital- and technology-intensive to an unprecedented degree, American industry created a rhythm of life and an extraordinarily disciplined and numbing division of labor which made possible a higher standard of living even as it demanded more exhausting and alienating labor. . . . Until 1919 capital investment was geared, unprecedentedly, to utilizing technological innovations to replace labor, and the manhours worked as a ratio of manufacturing output fell by almost one-half between 1880 and 1929.
>
> (72)

This "unique working class" produced a unique worker. One of the first to describe this "Fordized" worker was Antonio Gramsci. Commenting on Frederick Taylor's methods of scientific management, he wrote:

> Taylor is in fact expressing with brutal cynicism the purpose of American society—developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy and initiative on the part of the worker, and reducing productive operations exclusively to the mechanical, physical aspect.
>
> (302)[3]

In order to produce and maintain such a worker his life as a whole had to be controlled, by "preserving outside of work, a certain psycho-physiological equilibrium which prevents the physiological collapse of the worker, exhausted by the new method of production" (303).

This meant that drinking and womanizing had to be controlled. In fact, Gramsci saw Prohibition resulting from the need for the new man, and not as an aspect of the Puritan strain in America civilization. About womanizing he wrote at some length:

> "Womanizing" demands too much leisure. The new type of worker will be a repetition, in a different form, of peasants in the villages. The relative stability of sexual unions among the peasants is closely linked to the system of work of the country. The peasant who returns home in the evening after a long and hard day's work wants the "*venerem facilem parabilemque*" of Horace. . . . It seems clear that the new industrialism wants monogamy: it wants the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of "excess" is no good for his work.[4]
>
> (304–05)

I hope to make clear in my discussion that Bukowski's depiction of the American worker corroborates Gramsci's explanation of the function of Fordist labor-relations practices, which in turn allows us to see Bukowski's depiction as possessing a certain universality. What has been seen as the idiosyncratic response of an "alcoholic" malcontent is an objective class response. It should be made clear that Gramsci's caveat about "womanizing/demand[ing] too much leisure" has to be seen in a broad sense. Womanizing is never just sexual; otherwise prostitution would serve the same function. It is a convenient term for the whole social apparatus accompanying it. It is the pursuit, and the time it takes, that monogamy (in Gramsci's view) is aimed at defeating.

The crisis of the 1930s, closely following the amazing increase in technological efficiency of the first quarter-century, had prompted a call for shorter hours as one means of providing work for a greater number of people. As noted, Roosevelt rejected this option, and eventually World War II pulled the American economy out of the Depression. The release of pent-up demand after the War led to the (for the most part) flush times of the 1950s. Hence it wasn't until the 1960s that, for both economic and cultural reasons, the issue of work and alienated labor again began to be widely discussed. Several factors contributed to this: the crisis of legitimacy created by the Vietnam War resulted in an increased willingness to question a number of issues previously deemed moot; the ever-increasing technological efficiency of the American economic system, due now to the perfection of the computer microchip, had put mankind at that point envisioned by Marx in the *Grundrisse* of 1857–58 (discussed below) where human labor-power was no longer a significant factor in the production of wealth; finally, mental labor was being collapsed into physical labor at an astonishing rate, as increasingly jobs previously differentiated from those of the industrial proletariat came to resemble that archetype of alienated labor, the factory; and those who worked them were aware of it.[5] "The most characteristic feature of modern labor," Aronowitz wrote "is the convergence of mental and manual labor" in that

> Government employees, those engaged in retail and wholesale trades, and workers in corporate bureaucracies performing manual operations on accounting machines or typewriters can hardly be considered radically different from industrial workers in general. The transformation of the office into a large-scale organization had been accompanied by the imposition of efficiency engineering or scientific management upon work relations. . . .
>
> (312)

All these factors combined to create a mood (whether in Swados' auto assembly-line worker or Bukowski's postal clerk—and there were wildcat strikes in both industries at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s) where a reexamination of traditional American values with respect to work could be undertaken. Work and the "work ethic," that had been positively valorized in Franklin, Alger and others, were now undergoing an agonizing reappraisal.[6]

A fundamental shift in the Left's attitude to work also took place. The increasing influence of Marx's *Grundrisse* (containing his economic manuscripts of 1857–58 and notebook extracts from 1850–51, but first published in 1939 and not published in English until 1973) was an important factor in this New Left analysis of the role of work in late capitalism. Marx had written:

> But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labor-time and on the amount of labor employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labor-time. . . . Labor no longer appears so much to be included within the production process. . . . As soon as labor in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labor time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange-value . . . of use value.
>
> (704–705)

One of the most influential New Left reanalyses of the role of work—and influenced by the publication of the *Grundrisse*—was Herbert Marcuse's, undertaken in such books as *Eros and Civilization* (1955), *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) and *An Essay On Liberation* (1969). In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse elaborated a reading of Freud influenced by the Frankfurt School's Marxist cultural critique. In post-revolutionary capitalism, domination was maintained through the

> specific reality principle that has governed the origins and the growth of this civilization. We designate it as performance principle in order to emphasize that under its rule society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members.
>
> (46–47)

Marcuse is not merely criticizing class society; he is pointing out what he views as the irrationality of a situation that while once necessary, is no longer so. The freeing up of man's libidinal energy, its liberation from the temporal constraints of the workday, which should have followed upon the lessening need for his alienated labor, has not occurred; the domination originally necessary—based on an economy of scarcity—has remained as that condition of scarcity is (potentially) no more. The principle which had made sense in an economy of scarcity (roughly speaking: "the harder you work, the more you get") no longer makes sense, and domination through this principle has been irrationally "exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged position" (33–34). The core of Marcuse's analysis is his critique of the persistence of the performance principle in a society where it is no longer necessary, a society in which, in contrast to that of Franklin's *Autobiography*, the Alger novels or even Taylor's steel mills, human labor has been effectively divorced from the production of wealth. Marcuse emphasized that the increased productivity of industrial society had not only not been used to diminish alienated labor, but had been retained in order to sustain class societies, which by their very nature would never abolish such labor:

> For the world of human freedom cannot be built by the established societies, no matter how much they may streamline and rationalize their dominion. Their class structure, and the perfected controls required to sustain it, generate needs, satisfactions, and values which reproduce the servitude of the human existence. This "voluntary" servitude (voluntary inasmuch as it is introjected into the individuals), which justifies the benevolent masters, can be broken only through a political commitment in the infrastructure of man, a political practice of methodical disengagement from and refusal of the Establishment, aiming at a radical transvaluation of values.[7]

However idealist Marcuse's solution may be, my point here is that the issues he was the first to raise for a large audience in his books of the 50s and 60s sprang from a socio-economic matrix in which Bukowski's novels were also embedded; Bukowski's novelistic response was the literary cognate to social criticism like Marcuse's.

Although it is clear that a reevaluation of the function of work was taking place from a variety of political perspectives, very little of this reevaluation appeared in the fiction of the period. Bukowski's decision to undertake a thorough treatment of this area is in and of itself a significant contribution. His success is all the more remarkable because there was so little for him to build on in the immediate past and because (in part a result of this lack) the way in which he did it constituted a sharp break with earlier treatments.

Post Office is a short novel and one of its strengths is its focus on work, on the job, and on its effects on the individual. My analysis of it will be somewhat skewed because I have left out the personal relationships (in the novel Henry Chinaski marries, divorces and fathers a child) and will probably make the novel seem more a *Tendenzroman* than it may appear to be. Yet, as its title suggests, Bukowski has in mind an institutional critique, and that institution is not only the U.S. Post Office in the 1950s and 1960s but the institution of bureaucratized work in the United States. That work was Bukowski's central concern became clear with the publication of *Factotum*, four years later.

Post Office is Bukowski's critique of (neo-)Taylorism and Fordism. Though the events of the novel take place a good three-quarters of a century after Taylor's initial studies in scientific management, and forty years after the publication of *Scientific Management*, Bukowski's critique centers on the worker who has been de-skilled and reduced to mindless repetition ("All you moved was your right arm") and little autonomy. That such a critique is no anachronism (not limited to traditional industrial jobs) was also acknowledged by the authors of *Work in America* (a government-sponsored study undertaken to investigate the worrisome dissatisfaction of American workers with their jobs), when they noted that "the anachronism of Taylorism" was a significant factor in job dissatisfaction:

> It should be noted that Taylorism and a misplaced conception of efficiency is not restricted to assembly lines or . . . the manufacturing sector of the economy. The service sector is not exempt. . . . [where Tayloristic practice] rigidifies tasks, reduces the range of skills utilized by most of the occupations, increases routinization, and opens the door to job dissatisfaction for a new generation of highly educated workers. (19)

Bukowski's novel makes it clear that that door was wide open at the Post Office.

The reader of *Post Office* soon realizes the unpleasant nature of postal work. The novel's second sentence ("It was Christmas season and I learned from the drunk up the hill, who did the trick every Christmas, that they would hire damned near anybody . . ." [9/13]) suggests that such work can be compared with the most alienated labor and that one has to anesthetize oneself in order to be able do it. As a substitute carrier, Henry Chinaski works only when a regular worker fails to show up and "the regulars usually called in sick when it rained or during a heatwave or the day after a holiday when the mail load was doubled" (10/14). The work itself is inhumanly demanding and made worse by the presence of a sadistic supervisor:

> There were 4 or 5 different routes, maybe more, each one was different, you were never able to learn any of them, you had to get your mail up and ready before 8 a.m. for the truck dispatches. and Jenstone would take no excuses. The substitutes routed their magazines in corners, went without lunch, and died in the streets. Jenstone would have us start casing the routes 30 minutes late—spinning in his chair in his red shirt—"Chinaski take route 5A9!" We'd start a half hour short but were still expected to get the mail up and out and be back on time. And once or twice a week, already beaten, fagged and fucked we had to make the night pickups, and this schedule on the board was impossible—the truck wouldn't go that fast. You had to skip four or five boxes on the first run and the next time around they were stacked with mail and you stank, you ran with sweat jamming it into the sacks. (10/15)

This is clearly an unreasonable situation, and Chinaski, as a reasonable man, attempts to rectify it. He realizes that such behavior on the part of a supervisor rests on the acquiescence of those he is dominating. Since workers have rights, he tries to do something about the situation:

> The subs themselves made Jenstone possible by obeying his impossible orders. I couldn't see how a man of such obvious cruelty could be allowed to have his position. The regulars didn't care, the union man was worthless, so I filled out a thirty page report on one of my days off, mailed one copy to Jenstone and took the other down to the Federal Building.

After being made to wait an hour and a half, he is

> taken in to see a little grey-haired man with eyes like cigarette ash. He didn't ask me to sit down. He began screaming at me as I entered the door.
>
> "You're a wise son of a bitch, aren't you?"
>
> "I'd rather you didn't curse me, sir!"
>
> "Wise son of a bitch, you're one of those sons of bitches with a vocabulary and you like to lay it around!"
>
> He waved my papers at me. And screamed: "MR. JENSTONE IS A FINE MAN!"
>
> "Don't be silly. He's an obvious sadist," I said.
>
> "How long have you been in the Post Office?"
>
> "3 weeks."
>
> "MR. JENSTONE HAS BEEN WITH THE POST OFFICE FOR 30 YEARS!"
>
> "What does *that* have to do with it?" (10–11/15–16)

The humor in the passage comes in part from Chinaski's low-key attitude. Throughout the novels, it is something that remains constant in Chinaski's behavior vis-à-vis management and often results in a situation being comic that in real life most likely was not. The humor, I think, also results from Chinaski's implacable and unalterable position: I don't need this job. Yet of course he *does* need the jobs); if he didn't need them Bukowski wouldn't have written an entire novel about finding them, losing them and having to find them again. Chinaski's stance is utopian and so diametrically opposed both to the stances of his immediate antagonists (the bosses) and to that of his real condition in life (he has to work at least some of the time) that a humor of incongruity results. The humor also comes from the way in which his depiction of the "little grey-haired man" cuts across the pretentious jargon with which organizations present their "rationality." This is no "appropriate," "professional" handling of the "interview."

Unsatisfied, Chinaski returns to work at the station, where he is harassed by Jenstone who repeatedly writes him up for various infractions, ranging from lateness to leaving his cap on top of his locker after a memo was circulated stating that this was contrary to Post Office procedure. Chinaski accepts this state of affairs, knowing "from my trip downtown that any protest was useless" (13/21). The Post Office affects others, too, for instance, one G.G., who

> had been a carrier since his early twenties and now he was in his late sixties. His voice was gone. He didn't speak. He croaked. And when he croaked he didn't say much. He was neither liked nor disliked. He was just there. His face had wrinkled into strange runs and mounds of unattractive flesh. No light shone from his face. He was just a hard old krony who had done his job: G.G. The eyes looked like dull bits of clay dropped into the eye sockets. It was best if you didn't think about him or look at him. (27/42–43)

G.G. is unfairly accused of child molestation and this begins to affect his performance:

> Although G.G. knew his case upsidedown, his hands were slowing. He had simply stuck too many letters in his life—even his sense-deadened body was finally revolting. Several times during the morning I saw him falter. He'd step and sway, go into a trance, then snap out of it and stick some more letters. I wasn't particularly fond of the man. His life hadn't been a brave one, and he had turned out to be a hunk of shit more or less. But each time he faltered, something tugged at me. It was like a faithful horse who just couldn't go any more. Or an old car, just giving it up one morning. (28/44–45)

Unable to box up his mail in time, owing to a last-minute addition of a "bundle of circulars," G.G. "put his head down in his arms and began to cry softly" (28) and then runs up to the locker room. The complete lack of solidarity among the workers is emphasized as nobody helps G.G. (though Chinaski tries) nor shows even the least interest in him. And, as happens with alarming frequency in Bukowski's writings about work, the affected worker never shows up again:

> I never saw G.G. again. Nobody knew what happened to him. Nor did anybody ever mention him again. The "good guy." The dedicated man. Knifed across the throat over a handful of cirs from a local market—with its special: a free bee of a brand name laundry soap, with a coupon, and any purchase over $3. (29/47)

Towards the end of the novel the effect of the job is again discussed. Chinaski has quit the Post Office only to return a short time later, this time as a clerk rather than a carrier. The change in jobs is important because it allows Bukowski to generalize his critique of work since the work of the postal clerk is more purely "mind" work than that of the carrier. It may not be mental work of a very high order, but the task is no longer primarily physical. It is an example of what Marcuse, in *An Essay on Liberation*, called the "dematerialization of labor" (41) and the work, though no longer physical, remains "debilitating" (13). This is apparent on the very first evening of work (Chinaski works evenings):

> After nine or ten hours people began getting sleepy and falling into their cases, catching themselves just in time. We were working the zoned mail. If a letter read zone 28 you stuck it to hole no. 28. it was simple. One big black guy leaped up and began swinging his arms to keep awake. He staggered about the floor. "God damn! I can't stand it!" he said. And he was a big powerful brute. (41–42/67)

As with the carrier job, there are oppressive supervisors and irrational work rules:

> No talking allowed. Two 10 minute breaks in 8 hours. They wrote down the time when you left and the time when you came back. If you stayed 12 or 13 minutes, you heard about it.
>
> But the pay was better than at the art store. And, I thought, I might get used to it.
>
> I never got used to it. (42/68)

Like the carrier's job, the work is debilitating over the long term, too:

> It years shot through the head. I had seen the job eat men up. They seemed to melt. There was Jimmy Potts of Corsey Station. When I first came in, Jimmy had been a well-built guy in a white T-shirt. Now he was gone. He put his seat as close to the floor as possible and braced himself from falling over with his feet. He was too tired to get a haircut and had worn the same pair of pants for 3 years. He changed shirts twice a week and walked very slow. They had murdered him. He was 55. He had 7 years to go until retirement.
>
> "I'll never make it," he said me.
>
> They either melted or they got fat, huge, especially around the ass and the belly. It was the stool and the same motion and the same talk. And there I was, dizzy spells and pains in the arms, neck, chest, everywhere. I slept all day resting for the job. On weekends I had to drink to forget it. I had come in weighing 185 pounds. Now I weighed 223 pounds. All you moved was your right arm. (104/179)

In addition to these burdens there are other aspects of the job that are at least as bad, such as the inflexible "rationality" of the system. At one point, towards the end of his career as a postal clerk, Chinaski is called in for "counselling." It has taken him longer to sort a tray of mail than the standard requires:

> "Look, you took 28 minutes on a 22 minute tray. That's all there is to it."
>
> "You know better. Each tray is two feet long. Some trays have 3, even 4 times as many letters than others. The clerks grab what they call the "fat" trays. I don't bother. Somebody has to stick with the tough mail. Yet all you guys know is that each tray is two feet long and that it must be stuck in 22 minutes. But we're not sticking trays in those cases, we're sticking letters."
>
> "No, no, this thing has been time-tested."
>
> "Maybe it has. I doubt it. But if you're going to time a man, don't judge him on one tray. Even Babe Ruth struck out now and then. Judge a man on ten trays, or a night's work. You guys just use this thing to hang anybody who gets in your craw."
>
> "All right, you've had your say, Chinaski. Now, I'm telling YOU: you stuck a 28 minute tray. We go by that. Now, if you are caught on another slow tray you will be due for ADVANCED COUNSELLING!" (105/180)

Bukowski is making two points here: first, the ultimate irrationality of a system that is presumably rationalized ("this thing has been time-tested."). The problem with much performance evaluation is that anything that can be quantified (number of letters sorted, articles published, claimants interviewed) is then used as the basis of decisions that also imply a judgment on quality (correctness of the clerk Chinaski's sorting of mail). Here, of course, even the quantifying of the task is handled clumsily. Chinaski's criticism is correct; and his second point, concerning the arbitrary nature of its use, and of what is often its real function, is also valid. The two are related. If the system were truly rational, i.e., constructed with a view to the costs and benefits for those working in it and not only for those it serves, it would not function in as irrational and arbitrary a manner as it does here. The arbitrariness is heightened by the "counsellor's" last words on the matter which, at the same time, give the lie to the whole interview. Chinaski is allowed his "say," i.e., in a purely formal bow to work-place "democracy" he's allowed to speak, but the counsellor "tells" Chinaski, and that's that. This also contributes to the humor in the terms "counselling" and "ADVANCED COUNSELLING." They are purely formal terms, just as Chinaski's "say" has been a purely formal one. The humor comes—once again in Bukowski—from the gap between appearance and reality.

Bukowski's critique of work is not limited to its effects on the job. He also wants to show that its tentacles reach out into the life of the worker outside of work, that work serves broad functions of social control, that, in effect, "Fordism," as well as Taylorism, is not dead. Gramsci had seen such behavior on the part of management as the expression of its need to control the workforce, "to elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process" (286).

> The attempts made by Ford, with the aid of a body of inspectors, to intervene in the private lives of his employees and to control how they spent their wages and how they lived is an indication of these tendencies. . . . Someone who works for a wage, with fixed hours, does not have time to dedicate himself to the pursuit of drink or to sport or to evade the law.

At one point in the novel Chinaski calls in sick to spend some time with an old girlfriend.

> At that time, when you called in sick the post office sent out a nurse to spot check, to make sure you weren't nightclubbing or sitting in a poker parlor. My place was close to the central office, so it was convenient for them to check up on me. Betty and I had been there about two hours when there was a knock on the door.
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "All right," I whispered, "shut up! Take off those high heels, go into the kitchen and don't make a sound."
>
> "JUST A MOMENT!" I answered the knocker.
>
> I lit a cigarette to kill my breath, then went to the door and opened it a notch. It was the nurse. The same one. She knew me. (55–56/94)

This bit of Fordist labor relations is then matched by a similar story that Betty tells about a former boyfriend who worked for the county, after which Chinaski remarks "Damn, they won't let a man live at all, will they? They always want him at the wheel" (57/96).

Bukowski also depicts work as a means of exercising ideological control, demonstrating its usefulness in indoctrinating the citizenry and he shows that the function of such indoctrination is increased production, rather than a response to any real threat. Since the Post Office was a government agency, it was all the more easily (and thus all the more crudely) managed. In this instance it occurs, appropriately enough, during a training session (the passage reflects the era of the novel's composition and underlines the political content of Bukowski's writing; it is hard to imagine such a passage being published in the 1950s or even the early 1960s). A training instructor is lecturing before a large map ("It covered half the stage"):

> Then he said, "Look here. That's *Alaska*! And there *they* are! Looks almost as if they could jump across, doesn't it?"
>
> "Yeah," said some brainwash job in the front row.
>
> The italians flipped the map. It leaped crisply up into itself, crackling in war fury.
>
> Then he walked in the front of the stage, pointed his rubber-tipped pointer at us.

"I want you to understand that we've got to hold down the ledger! I want you to understand that EACH LETTER YOU STICK—EACH SECOND, EACH MINUTE, EACH HOUR, EACH DAY, EACH WEEK—EACH EXTRA LETTER YOU STICK BEYOND DUTY HELPS DEFEAT THE RUSSIANS! Now, that's all for today."

(46/76)

Although *Post Office* is a first-person narrative, and the idiosyncratic protagonist underlines the novel's subjective tone, objectivity is achieved by showing the effects of the job not just on Chinaski, but on his fellow-workers as well, by revealing either their physical decay or concrete symptoms of psychological decline, as, for example, their dress.

Beyond this, Bukowski shows almost no one prospering under the system. The few examples of those who advance or are satisfied, are special cases, exceptions proving the rule. Both Tom Mote, a carrier from Chinaski's early days with the Post Office, who reappears briefly as a supervisor, and the woman who hands him his resignation forms, "a young black girl . . . well-dressed and pleased with her surroundings. . . . I would have gone mad with the same job" (118), are minority-group members with lower expectations regarding work. Bukowski is no racist and what he suggests by such examples is that only those who suffer discrimination, and are thus thankful for any opportunity, find such work acceptable.

4

In his first novel, Bukowski's critique focused on the alienating and exploitative nature of the job. In effect, *Post Office* is a critique of the persistence of Taylorist and Fordist management techniques into the 1950s and 1960s and a depiction of the de-skilling and the transformation of "mind-work" into factory type labor. Bukowski's standpoint, in his critique, is akin to that of the labor sociologist Harry Braverman in its avoidance of the issue of (radical) consciousness. This is one reason why the political aspect of his work has been overlooked. In *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Braverman wrote: "No attempt will be made to deal with the modern working class on the level of its consciousness, organization, or activities. This is a book about the working class as a class *in itself*, not as a class *for itself*."[9] This does not mean that an individual's subjective consciousness is without value, but rather that its value is limited for an objective analysis.[9]

What is important throughout *Post Office* is that Chinaski refuses to accept the alienated situation as normal. For all his cynicism and personal alienation, Chinaski is representative of a new class of worker, educated and unwilling to accept the rigidified bureaucratic relations that obtained in mid-century America. His is the attitude of the worker of the 1960s and later, although the events he is writing about occur in the 1950s and early 1960s. It is difficult to tell to what extent such attitudes were present in the 1950s but remained unexpressed in the atmosphere of the Cold War. It is the worker that was so troubling to the authors of *Work in America*, who spoke of the "challenge" presented by the "alienation and disenchantment of blue-collar workers" [xv] and who found "convincing evidence that some blue collar workers are carrying their work frustrations home and displacing them in extremist social and political movements or in hostility towards the government" (30). Bukowski's critique of the persistence of scientific management techniques is also significant. Scientific management had supposedly been superseded by the "Human Relations" school in the 1920s (of which the "counselling" episode is an example) but *Post Office* shows that this was not the case.

While Bukowski's critique in *Post Office* focused on a large bureaucratic institution, in *Factotum*, he criticized the institution of work per se. In the course of the decade the novel spans, Henry Chinaski holds twenty-odd jobs in New Orleans, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Miami Beach and San Francisco.[9] Work is always his reason for being anywhere. Hence the emphasis on work emerges more clearly and the effect is more powerful than in the earlier book. Still, if *Post Office* was still mainly about work, *Factotum* is a novel that is even more centrally about work, and more important, about the refusal of work.

Factotum, in fact, is the clearest statement of what might be called the refusal-to-work ethic, as well as its justification. It is because of this justification (discussed in the next section) that it marks a turning-point in the treatment of work in novels about the American working-class. The hermetic world of *Factotum* makes Bukowski's critique all the more effective: work is the world and the world is work. The representation of many horrible jobs, as opposed to just one, reinforces the powerful dead-end impression that is one of the novel's great achievements. It is not that one happens to have a horrible job: jobs are horrible.

Factotum focuses on the experiences of Henry Chinaski as he travels around the United States, working. Although Chinaski crosses the country from coast to coast four times in the course of the novel, most of the novel takes place in Los Angeles. Chinaski also has relationships with several women, the main one with Jan Meadowe, with whom he lives on and off for almost a decade. This aspect of the novel ends about two-thirds of the way through the book and from that point on Chinaski undergoes a gradual, though seemingly inexorable, decline, climaxed (if that's the word) when, at the very end of the novel—sans woman, sans home, sans job—he goes to a burlesque show in downtown Los Angeles where, watching a stripper perform, he "couldn't get it up."

Factotum begins with the protagonist out of work, and throughout the book work figures as an intrusion into one's otherwise pleasant (or at least tolerable) existence, as in Chinaski's first brush with it in the novel:

I went out on the street, as usual, one day and strolled along. I felt happy and relaxed. The sun was just right. Mellow. There was peace in the air. As I approached the center of the block there was a man standing outside the doorway of a shop. I walked past.

"Hey, BUDDY!"

I stopped and turned.

"you want a job?"

(13)

It is not just the work itself that is so horrible but the felt presence of the job throughout life. Even when not at work, the job is still there, deforming people and human relationships in a variety of ways (so closely is individual self-esteem tied to work):

I remember how my father used to come home each night and talk about his job to my mother. The job talk began when he entered the door, continued over the dinner table, and ended in the bedroom where my father would scream "Lights out!" at 8 p.m., so he could get his rest and his full strength for the job the next day. There was no other subject except the job.[9]

(13)

Looking for a job is also an unpleasant process: "Even during World War II when there was supposed to be a manpower shortage there were four or five applicants for each job. (At least for the menial jobs!" (54).

Before people have jobs they are contorting life histories (not to mention themselves) "trying (to look ambitious" (15)) to appear acceptable:

I had elaborated on my work experience in a creative way. (You do that: you leave out the previous low-grade jobs and describe the better ones fully. . . . Of course, since all my previous jobs were low-grade I left out the lower low-grade.

(127)

And, "I lengthened my tenure at the jobs I had previously had, turning days into months and months into years" (159), or lying outright about their present situation: " 'You're married?' 'Yes. With one child. A boy. Tommy, age 3' " (170), or ingratiating themselves hypocritically: "I had to demean myself (to get that one—I told them that I liked to think of my job as a second home. That pleased them" (102). The anxiety doesn't end with getting a job: "The work was easy and dull but the clerks were in a constant state of turmoil. They were worried about their jobs" (16). Nor is such anxiety limited to the lower levels: "I sat across from the editor, a man in shirt sleeves with deep hollows under his eyes. He looked as if he hadn't slept for a week" (18). Not only is work routine, boring and poorly paid, but there is far too much of it:

The problem, as it was in those days during the War, was overtime. Those in control always preferred to overwork a few men continually, instead of hiring more people so everyone might work less. You gave the boss eight hours, and he always asked for more. He never sent you home after six hours, for example. You might have time to think.

(57)

(This had been a significant part of Bukowski's critique in *Post Office*, too: "It was twelve hours a night . . ." (60/101).)

These are, of course, more or less obvious instances of Bukowski's critique, (though no less telling for that. But perhaps even more effective, because so subtly expressed, are the ways in which he smuggles his critique into the linguistic structures of the novel. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the descriptions of work seen through Chinaski's eyes (especially when the possibility arises of Chinaski doing any of that work). In his descriptions of people at work he creates an aura and a distance that manage to be both humorous and menacing. Such passages strongly contrast with the concreteness of so much of Bukowski's writing. Following the opening assault quoted above, chapter 3 continues:

I walked back to where he stood. Over his shoulder I could see a large dark room. There was a long table with men and women standing on both sides of it. They had hammers with which they pounded objects in front of them. In the gloom the objects appeared to be clams. They smelled like clams. I turned and continued walking down the street.

(13)

This description is striking in the distance it effects between the reader and the activity, work: Chinaski, looking over a shoulder, in the gloom, to a large dark room. The vagueness produced by the omission of the definite article in the fourth sentence and the uncertainty produced by "appeared" and "like" combine to create the impression of a situation so routinized, dehumanizing and just plain depressing that we feel it would be too unpleasant to the narrator to have to describe it in more detail. Chinaski's dead-in-his-tracks stance further contributes to the impression of immobility and impotence to which the spectator has been reduced. A similar description occurs a few pages later, on the occasion of a job interview at a newspaper:

I sat across from the editor, a man in shirt sleeves with deep hollows under his eyes. He looked as if he hadn't slept for a week. It was cold and dark in there. It was the composing room of one of the town's two newspapers, the small one. Men sat at desks under reading lamps working at copy.

(18)

Once again, the omission of the articles in the last sentence dehumanizes the work process. As in the first description, these are de-individualized individuals, people robbed of any identity, unqualified by even an article and in this they are one with the inorganic objects which constitute their work and environment: "desks," "reading lamps," "copy." By omitting the articles, giving us quasi-telegraphic sentences, Bukowski abstracts the process and universalizes it. We see people objectified, almost non-human, zombies: objects working on objects. Because of these stylistic characteristics, the processes described are also, and are meant to be, representative of work in general, rather than of any specific job. The regular rhythm of the final sentence lends it a narrative, epic broadness which underlines the universality of the events being described. (With one more foot it would be a perfect dactylic hexameter, the line of the classical epic.) This, in turn, imparts a statelikeness to the description of the work and the contrast between the stately form and the mundane content produces a mock-heroic effect.

One final point about the language in this paragraph shows how subtle and political Bukowski's seemingly unsophisticated prose is. In the penultimate sentence Bukowski writes "small" rather than "smaller," the word we would expect in a comparison of two things. Why? Because, by making the adjective absolute rather than comparative, the inferior position is emphasized. If the comparative aspect were emphasized, then the possibility of change would be felt to be greater because it would be shown to be small only in relation, and for something "small" to grow relatively, either with respect to itself or to something else, that is to become "larger," is conceivable in a way that the categorical change from "small" to "large" is not. Bukowski has cast the issue in these terms because he wants to suggest a connection between the editor's looking "as if he hadn't slept in a week" and his newspaper's secondary position: it is behind in the competition and has to overtake, or at least catch up with, its rival and the effort to do this is affecting the editor. One of the themes of the novel, as well as of Bukowski's work generally, is that to be successful in society's terms one has to make unwarranted sacrifices, even, sometimes, of one's own body.

Even when it isn't a question of Chinaski himself working, Bukowski depicts work negatively. At one point there is a fire in Chinaski's apartment building:

I went to the door and opened it. There was thick smoke in the hall. Firemen in large metal helmets with numbers on them. Firemen dragging long thick hoses. Firemen dressed in asbestos. Firemen with axes. The noise and the confusion was incredible. I closed the door.

(110)

The anaphoric "Firemen" and the pseudo-sentences, the omission of articles and the lack of any kind of subordination which might clarify the relationship between men and objects so closely identify the workers with the work as to suggest the inevitability of work completely objectifying the worker. Work objectifies people: people then objectify each other: the world becomes a world of objects. Such is Bukowski's syllogism and the extent to which individuals are objectified in *Factotum* is striking.

5

In *Factotum* Bukowski offers a radical, generalized critique of work and its function in U.S. society and, for the first time, a strategy of resistance.[9] In *Factotum* the refusal to work has become systematic and programmatic. At the newspaper in New Orleans, sent to borrow type from the competing paper: "I found a place in a back alley where I could get a glass of beer for a nickel. . . . [T]he nickel beer place became my hangout. The fat man began to miss me" (19); at the bicycle warehouse he is fired for lateness (verging on absenteeism): "You've been showing up for work at 10:30 for 5 or 6 days now. How do you think the other workers feel about this? They work an eight hour day" (94); at the *Los Angeles Times*, assigned to shine a brass railing that runs around the building (a task which "appeared to be the dullest and most stupid" of all the jobs he had ever had), "I polished about twenty-five feet of the railing, turned the corner, and saw a bar across the street. I took my rags and bar across the street and went into the bar" (147-148). Refusal is by no means always tied to drinking, but the relation of the two deserves comment. Although Bukowski has written much of drinking alone, in *Factotum* this is by no means always the case, as the two examples just cited show. The bar represents not just alcohol but a humane alternative to the lack of human relationships that usually characterize the workplace. There is an interesting depiction of this on the second page of the novel, after Chinaski has gotten a room:

I was in a room on the second floor across from a bar. The bar was called The Gangplank Cafe. From my room I could see through the open bar doors and into the bar. There were some rough faces in that bar, some interesting faces. I stayed in my room at night and drank wine and looked at the faces in the bar. . . .

(12)

This is a revealing passage: Chinaski, on the outside looking in is drawn to the bar, but hesitant and ambivalent about joining that society (after all, there were "rough" as well as "interesting" elements in it). It is not so much the drinking, per se, as the bar community that is attractive (to the shy outsider, a community where the performance of alienating work is not the measure of success. In fact, in chapter 22, (the most extended treatment of this community, in which Chinaski cleans the venetian blinds for drinks, the camaraderie of the group is exemplary, the two notable exceptions being the manipulative and exploiting manager who tries to cheat Chinaski out of his "pay" and the faithless prostitute. That incident is notable in another way, Chinaski's implicit refusal of the wage, the connection between work and income. As soon as he is paid, he buys everyone drinks with the money and in the end winds up owing the manager.

At the job at the *Times*, Chinaski, given another chance, is assigned inside janitorial work:

I finished both the ladies' and the men's restrooms, emptied the wastebaskets and dusted a few desks. Then I went back to the ladies' crapper. They had sofas and chairs in there

and an alarm clock. I set the alarm for thirty minutes before quitting time. I stretched out on one of the couches and went to sleep.

(153)

Unobserved, he repeats the procedure the next night, though this time he is caught sleeping and fired.

At the Hotel Sans, his last job in the novel,

> I was assigned to the loading dock. That loading dock had *style*: for each truck that came in there were ten guys to unload it when it took only two at the most. I wore my best clothes. I never touched anything.

(191)

This last example of refusal is interesting, and funny. I think the humor results from Bukowski's vivid and concrete illustrations—indeed, proofs—of Chinaski's not working: the fact that he could wear his "best" clothes (also an interesting indication that his wardrobe allows of such categorizing) and as the ultimate proof the fact that work, as it were, didn't lay a hand on him. Yet, as so often in Bukowski, there is something else going on here. The key word in the passage (and Bukowski makes sure we recognize it as such) is "style." It is an odd choice because one doesn't ordinarily think of a loading dock as having a style. We usually attribute that quality to humans or things that in some way reflect a person, i.e., the personality: clothes, physical gestures, prose. By using the word here Bukowski is humanizing the loading dock and what humanizes it is its lack of work. This is clear because that is the only quality of the loading dock revealed in the passage. Once again, in Bukowski, humanity is a function of the lack of exploitation (and at a 500-percent-plus oversupply of labor, the coefficient of exploitation here is very low indeed; in Chinaski's case, it is nil).

But the clearest statement of the refusal-to-work ethic and also its justification—and it is this justification that marks a turning-point in the treatment of work in novels of the American working class—come midway through *Factotum*.

> At the auto parts warehouse I did less and less. Mr. Mantz the owner would walk by and I would be crouched in a dark corner or in one of the aisles, very lazily putting incoming parts on the shelves.
>
> "Chinaski, are you all right?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "You're not sick?"
>
> "No."
>
> Then Mantz would walk off. The scene was repeated again and again with minor variations. Once he caught me making a sketch of the alley on the back of an invoice. My pockets were full of bookie money. The hangovers were not as bad, seeing as they were caused by the best whisky money could buy.
>
> I went on for two more weeks collecting paychecks. Then on a Wednesday morning Mantz stood in the center aisle near his office. He beckoned me forward with a motion of his hand. When I walked into his office, Mantz was back behind his desk. "Sit down, Chinaski." On the corner of the desk was a check, face down. I slid the check face down along the glass top of the desk and without looking at it I slipped it in my wallet.
>
> "You knew we were going to let you go?"
>
> "Bosses are never hard to fathom."
>
> "Chinaski, you haven't been pulling your weight for a month and you know it."
>
> "A guy busts his damned ass and you don't appreciate it."
>
> "You haven't been busting your ass, Chinaski."
>
> I stared down at my shoes for some time. I didn't know what to say. Then I looked at him. "I've given you my *time*. It's all I've got to give—it's all any man has. And for a pitiful buck and a quarter an hour."
>
> "Remember you begged for this job. You said your job was your second home."
>
> ". . . my time so that you can live in your big house on the hill and have all the things that go with it. If anybody has lost anything on this deal, on this arrangement . . . I've been the loser. Do you understand?"
>
> "All right, Chinaski."
>
> "All right?"
>
> "Yes. Just go."
>
> I stood up. Mantz was dressed in a conservative brown suit, white shirt, dark red necktie. I tried to finish it up with a flair. "Mantz, I want my unemployment insurance. I don't want any trouble about that. You guys are always trying to cheat a working man out of his rights. So don't give me any trouble or I'll be back to see you."
>
> "You'll get your insurance. Now get the hell out of here!"
>
> I got the hell out of there.

(112–113, emphasis in original)

Here Bukowski has shifted the grounds of the relationship between worker and employer. It is in this one instance, above all others, that he most differs from his contemporaries and his predecessors who have written about work. (One proof of the significance that he attributes to this incident is that the passage just quoted constitutes all of chapter 49 of *Factotum* and is placed almost exactly in the middle of the novel.) With his refusal to obey sickness Bukowski makes it quite clear that this is no fluke but a principled refusal. The mention of the sketching is important because, while it may be seen as hinting at a kind of aesthetic moralism, that is not its main function. Working lazily is still working, the concept of a wage tied to production is still—however tenuously—present. This connection disappears when work ceases.

When Henry Chinaski says, "I've given you my *time*. It's all I've got to give—it's all any *man has*," and ignores the fact—indeed, admits it—that he hasn't been working, let alone "busting his ass," he is breaking new ground in the relation between the working class and capital (at least in fiction) by divorcing the wage not just from productivity increases (a more moderate working-class demand and the basis of the consensus between labor and management from roughly the 1940s through the early 1970s) but from production *tout court*. The fact that he hasn't been working—the paramount issue from Mantz's point of view—is asserted to be meaningless from Chinaski's. The logical next step is that he should be paid for *not* working and this follows with the *demand* for unemployment insurance.

This is the point where Bukowski's novel is cognate with the New Left analyses of labor-capital relations discussed earlier, in that both are a reaction to a fundamentally different technological-economic social structure. Because labor was now divorced from productivity, a revolutionary working class no longer had to be a class that worked:

> [T]he key to capitalist accumulation is the constant re-creation and reproduction of the division between the waged and the unwaged parts of the class. . . . the cutting of the link between income and work is the decisive point at which the class recomposes itself.
>
> (*Midnight Oil*, 110, 113)

and it was in "this cycle (i.e., the capitalist crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s) that the struggle for income *through* work changed(d) to a struggle for income *independent* of work. The working-class strategy for *full employment* . . . became . . . a general strategy of the *refusal of work*" (110).[9] "In the Tendency (the divorce of labor from productive capital) is pushed *beyond value*. Once labor ceases to be the well-spring of wealth, value ceases to be the mediation of use-values."[9]

This is the significance of Chinaski's demand for unemployment insurance. While unemployment insurance is still tied to work, because one has to have worked in order to be eligible, the connection is much looser, and the idea that it is a "right," something expected by the worker—like paid holidays and annual leave—is marked, and certainly not a demand encountered in earlier proletarian fiction. The idea that the worker would prefer *not* to work goes against the grain of traditional socialist ideology, where work, and the worker, were glorified.[9] (A clarification of the U.S. unemployment benefits policy is perhaps helpful here. Practically speaking, the employer has a good deal to say in determining whether or not an employee receives benefits after he is terminated. Although the reason for Chinaski's being fired here—laziness—*might* be a little hard for the employer to prove, Mantz, if he wanted to, might well have gotten Chinaski denied benefits for other reasons—whether they were true or not—such as lateness or absenteeism.)

In the past there had been a connection between work and wealth. With the increased efficiency of technology, and hence the increasingly small part played by human labor in the production of wealth, that connection (the "law of value") has ceased, and because the causal relationship between human labor and wealth has in fact ceased to exist, distributing that wealth on the basis of one's work no longer makes sense. Value has here been dispensed with. Chinaski, too, realizes that "labor no longer appears as an integral element of the productive process" and that with the irrelevance of labor-time in relation to wealth, "exchange-value" (ceases to be) "the measure of use-value."

This state of affairs underlies the forms that Chinaski's refusal takes, forms that may at first seem somewhat problematic because of their individualistic nature. There is no instance of any kind of collective refusal in either *Post Office* or *Factotum*. The traditional American vehicle for such action had been aptly assessed by Henry Chinaski on the second page of *Post Office* when he noted that "the union man was worthless" (9/15). Here, too, Bukowski echoes New Left analyses, sharing, e.g., the analysis of American labor unions made by Kolko: "the fact remains that American unions *have* found it infinitely simpler to adjust to capitalism, or even to help manage it within their own industry, than to replace it" (158). The absenteeism, the lateness, the malingering, the pilferage, all the minor forms of resistance, must be seen in the context of changes that were taking place in the relationship between labor and capital in the 1960s and 1970s, as part of a broader movement reflecting objective social change, rather than mere subjective maladaptation. This is underscored by the fact that

> The movement for shorter hours during the Vietnam War largely took place in small campaigns against overtime (sometimes under union auspices, more often informally) and in the decisions of countless, especially young workers to absent themselves from work, sometimes on a regular basis. The latter phenomenon . . . helped to spawn a huge literature concerning absenteeism, turnover and the "revolt against work."[9]
>
> (Kolko, 272)

Aronowitz noted that "[t]he wildcat strike of postal workers in 1978 took place over the heads of the union leadership and became a national strike without central coordination or direction" (258).

Although the incident at the auto parts warehouse takes place sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s, it was written in the early 1970s. It reflects the attitudes of tens of millions of American workers influenced by the events of the 1960s and it reflects historic technological changes. It is a measure of Bukowski's authenticity as an artist that he so perfectly captured a broad historical current of feeling in so unique and idiosyncratic a work of art. Underlying all the humor, the serious intent of *Factotum* must be recognized. It is no accident that Bukowski took four years to write it while he completed *Post Office* in three weeks.[9] It is strikingly unified in content, style and tone. That it reflects a growth and change in worldview—indeed, an increasing politicization—on Bukowski's part is clear not only when one compares it with *Post Office* and the earlier stories, but when one sees reflected in later works, poems as well as fiction, the worldview first expressed in this novel.

BUKOWSKI : NOTES

123: *"The only human essence . . ."* A. Negri, "Archaeology and Project: The Mass Worker and the Social Worker," 226.

126: *"But with Roosevelt's opting for full employment . . ."* The turning point was Roosevelt's refusal to fully back the Black–Connery thirty-hours bill of 1933. See Benjamin Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work*, Chapter 6, "FDR Counters Shorter Hours."

127: *"Taylor is in fact expressing . . ."* He is referring to Taylor's famous characterization of the pig-iron handler: "This work is so crude and elementary in its nature that the writer firmly believes that it would be possible to train an intelligent gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man can be." Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, 40.

127: *" 'Womanizing' demands too much leisure . . ."* For a contemporary expression of this "ethic" compare GM assembly-line worker Ben Hamper on a womanizing auto-worker who thinks a switch to the first shift will allow him time "to prowl for chicks the rest of the night.

> 'It doesn't work like that,' I told him. 'First shift only works for the married guys. They have a very rigid system—rush home, drink three beers, eat supper, watch *Wheel of Fortune*, hop the old lady and be sound asleep by 9:00. Clean, decent American living. A bar hound like you will never beat the clock. You'll miss so much work, your ass will be out on Van Slyke within a month.' " Ben Hamper, *Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line*, 186. (Gramsci's Latin quotation translates as "easy and available love.")

128: *". . . and those who worked them . . ."* Another factor was that the work week had not only stopped getting shorter, it had begun to get longer: "a comparison of 1949 and 1976 shows a 1.3 hour increase in average weekly working time." (Roediger and Foner, 257. Emphasis in original.) It gets worse according to Juliet B. Schor, who examined the period 1969–1997: "the average employed person is now on the job an additional 163 hours, or the equivalent of an extra month a year" (29). For the increased technological efficiency, cp. Harry Braverman: "Thus in the United States between 1947 and 1964 . . . the output of the textile industries grew by more than 40 percent but employment was cut by one third. Other industries, such as iron and steel foundries, lumber and wood products, malt liquors and footwear, showed production increases of from 15 percent to 40 percent in the same period, accompanied by employment drops of ten percent to 25 percent. The petroleum industry poured out five sixths more product at the end of the period than at the beginning, but its employment was one fourth lower." "The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century," in *Monthly Review* 34.1 (1982): 18.

128–129: *"Work and the 'work ethic' . . ."* I use quotation marks around the phrase because there is some doubt as to how strong such an ethic ever was, at least in some areas of Western capitalism. As one example, see E. P. Thompson's discussion of "Saint Monday" in his essay, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," in *Past & Present* 36 (December 1967): 73–74. It is not an accident that a number of the texts that I discuss in this essay were all published at roughly the same time, between 1971 and 1975, the beginning of capitalism's long crisis whose now notorious symptom, the decline in the real wage, is usually seen to have commenced in 1973.

130: *"For the world of human freedom . . ."* Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay On Liberation*, 6. Here Marcuse openly follows the Marx of the *Grundrisse*. Marcuse also saw the issue in concrete terms: "Since the length of the working day is itself one of the principal repressive factors imposed upon the pleasure principle by the reality principle, the reduction of the working day . . . is the first prerequisite for freedom." Quoted in Roediger and Foner, vii. Marcuse's prescription is idealist in that he would seem here to be saying that "values" are the cause of the " 'voluntary' servitude." His suggestions for how change may come about, "disengagement and refusal," seem passive, rather than engaged.

132: *"damn near anybody . . .' [9/13]" Post Office* was reset with new pagination in 1992 for the 26th and subsequent printings. Citations therefore give two page numbers, to the earlier and later printings respectively.

139: *"This be of Fordist . . ."* Ford himself put it this way: "When first we raised the wage to five dollars a day, we had to exercise some supervision over the living of the men because so many of them, being foreign born, did not raise their standards of living in accord with their higher incomes." Henry Ford in collaboration with Samuel Crowther, *Today and Tomorrow*, 159.

138: *"Since the Past Office . . ."* Such threats were even endorsed by unions. Cp. Roediger and Foner: "Moreover, unions repeatedly connected their acceptance of long hours with Cold War preparedness, as *The Machinist* [a union paper] did in 1957 when it headlined the question: 'Will Soviets Cut Their Overtime?' " (269).

139: *"This is a book about the working class . . ."* Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 26–27. Much of what Braverman says here is relevant to what makes Bukowski's writing about the American working class as important and powerful as it is, especially his remark that "what is needed first of all is a picture of the working class as it exists, as the shape given to the working population by the capital accumulation process."

139: *"This does not mean . . ."* Just how limited is seen, for example, in Studs Terkel's interview with a mail carrier in *Working* (361–364). This man feels quite differently about the job than Chinaski does. Subjectively, it would appear that he is not an alienated worker, though any but the most superficial reading of the interview leaves one with an impression of a worker who is, objectively, alienated.

148: *"In the course of the decade . . ."* Twenty-two, I think. The uncertainty is owing to certain problems of categorization, e.g., should his cleaning the venetian blinds of the Philadelphia bar for five dollars and free drinks, be counted as gainful employment? Should the trackman and cab driver positions where he receives no money (and no payment

→ contd later:

NEVER WORK EVER.

Dean settled intu the plush blue armchair and faced up to the Restart Officer. The whole floor was done out in fake pine and blue swivel chairs. Patronising 'Claimants Charter' posters were plastered onto every pillar, but the real business was revealed in the posters and leaflets urging you to join this scheme or that job club. No matter how they decked the place out it could only ever be a pressurised shithole, if only they'd switch the fuckin' heaters off sometimes...

"So, how many jobs a week, approximately, are you applying for Mr.Sutton?"
"Erm... about 4 or 5"
"And where do you look for these vacancies?"
"Newspapers, local and national ones, job centres, the council job shop..."
"Do you know how many vacancies are actually advertised when they arrive?"
"I dunno, most of them, I should think..."
"Actually its less than one third, employers know they can fill posts without having to advertise."
"Oh"
"What I'm saying to you, Mr.Sutton, is this, we need to see you applying for 60-70 jobs a week. Can you guarantee this?"
"Well, yes, I suppose..."
"And where will you find these vacancies?"
"I dunno,... if they don't advertise..., I dunno..."
"Job Club gets notice of all these vacancies, and you can get help assembling a c.v. and having it forwarded to prospective employers. Have you considered Job Club? Would you be willing to give it a try..?"
"Well, I'm not sure. I suppose so." Dean replied, his head dropping.

Dean heard a sharp click and looked up suddenly. The open office floor had contracted to the size of a small cell. the four walls cold and white. The pine desk scattered with leaflets and stationary was now a blank table. A second click interrupted the silence as the Restart Officer pressed the eject button and flipped the cassette out. He patted the plastic tape smugly.

"Thank you Mr.Sutton, we have all we need."

Dean now realised he was back in the police room having his taped interview done as a result of his extremely brief and unspectacular foray into shoplifting. Yet it wasnt a police officer he faced, it was definitely a Restart Officer with his 'Benefits Agency' id badge on. And the heat still persisted, the heat...

The buzzer alarm woke Dean up at 8.00 am dead on. He was sweating in a bad style, that same bastard nightmare again and again and again. He reached for a glass of water positioned on his bedside drawer. His hand was shaking.

In the neighbouring house Bill was having a much sweeter dream, though certainly no less intense. He was back in Cheedale working his route with a flowing perfection previously unseen in the world of climbing - a combination of balance, strength, stamina and agility. The particular area of rock he was working on he had named Baudrillard Buttress. It had been left untouched all throughout the 70's and 80's as the crag had been feverishly developed. The radical nature of the sustained overhang had frightened off all potential customers. Bill had been bolting routes on the crag for 2 years, beginning with a line that had stunned the climbing world...'In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities'. It had taken him over a year to train for this line, and it was still unrepeated for a clean ascent. The only other line on the buttress was 'The Revenge of the Crystal', also put up by Bill and mockingly named as such when one of his fiercest rivals had tried to nip in and steal the line only to be foiled by a large crystal finger pinch snapping off near the top bolt. It had been a further year of training and yet this third line had yet to fall. Bill was the only one attempting it and he had a name ready... it would be called 'Fatal Strategies'. All that remained were the final few moves, and it was this sequence that provided the sweetness of his dream.

The alarm clock buzzing in the terrace adjoining Bills bedroom also woke Bill up. He rolled over and the only thought was to expel the large glob of spit in his throat and then concentrate on pulling the moves and the feelings from his dream into his current thought pattern, to use later on the crag. He picked up a sheet of paper from the pile on the desk normally reserved for scrap. It was a cheaply produced leaflet on how to survive a Restart Interview, put together by some dumb anarchists from the capital. What a waste of effort he thought, anyone with half a braincell could cruise through a Restart interview, no problem. The leaflet pleaded for the recipient to photocopy and hand out near the benefits office. Ben carefully spat the greenie onto the paper and screwed it up and threw it into the bin. Now he needed a glass of orange juice to clear the speed from his system. This would have to be done before he began his stretching and preparation for his next attempt on the route.

He also needed to check the morning's post. He was expecting a book or 2 to review for his Situationist magazine 'Insufficient', as well as his usual supply of exchange magazines, flyers, rants and artworks as contributions for the next issue. Most of this went into Bill's personal library. Bill often talked about the Information War, and about getting actively involved in this war, but what Bill really liked was looking at his impressive library of texts and thinking about all the theory stacked up in there. The aura it gave off was intense. It was needed for when Bill sat down and wrote his articles for 'Insufficient'. Bill's magazine gave him a chance to have a rant about things, or to have a rant at people and organisations in the supposed revolutionary milieux. It also meant he received free magazines and books to add to his expanding library.

He swilled the orange juice around his mouth and scanned his desk. Shit, he thought, and grimaced, as he looked at the scrawled A4 sheet in front of him. He had this habit of writing stuff when he was speeding, and most of it was bullshit. However, it was normally clever bullshit that was doubly unintelligable. And it was this type of stuff that could fill out an issue of 'Insufficient'. No-one really complained, as since the advent of the 'Art Strike' there seemed more unintelligable bullshit around than ever before. But the stuff on Bill's desk was unusable for sure. As a Situationist Bill liked to switch words around to create new meanings, to detourn rhetoric to produce anti-rhetoric. "The meaning of change can be seen in a change of meaning" was what 'Insufficient' proclaimed in its masthead. But a lengthy rant on the history of dusthins as a transpose of the dustbin of history ideology was stretching a point a bit too far. Bill's mind returned to more immediate concerns, his attempt at the new route and the post which had not yet arrived. He was expecting this book to review, and also a cheque from his mum. Where was that bleedin' postman?

At 8.00 Steve was just starting the 100 or so houses on Capital Boulevard. He was already half an hour late on his round, mainly because he'd had a sackful of Poll Tax final demands to deliver. It wasn't the extra mail that was the problem, it was that Steve knew many of the people on his round, most of them old folks, and he had made an effort to cheer all of them up. Most of them were shaken by the official sounding letter from the council in their last desparate bid to recover this ill forsaken tax, and so Steve tried to calm people down by explaining that they were not alone , and telling them about the local anti poll tax groups in the area. It was only really making the most of a bad deal. Steve took the job as a postie mainly because he was strapped for cash, he was being pressed to meet an oncoming deadline to renew his season ticket and had other small debts to attend to. He thought that being a postman would be about as unintimidating a job as possible, and also he'd have a bit of time to think for himself and get to know the local community. It was days like these he felt like jacking it all in, either that or just ripping all these bills and demands into shreds. He couldn't see himself as anything other than the lowest ranking footsoldier in some huge oppressive army waging a war for capitalism. And on top of this he had a new financial crisis to worry about... someone had nicked his lad's mountain bike from outside the central library and he would have to fork out and replace it as his son depended on his bike for getting to college and for doing his local paper round. He'd only gone in to return some books but staff cutbacks had meant that one person was left attending a whole floor and a long wait for any service was inevitable. This had given the thief ample time to spot the bike, wait for an opportune moment, and then make a getaway.

He tried to push these thoughts aside as he moved down the street from house to house. As usual there was a clutch of letters for number 23, and as usual there were plenty of odd shaped envelopes adorned with various slogans and stickers. Steve never took much notice of them, he didn't have much time for art, but he had seen the chap who lived at no. 23 and would recognise him as an arrogant bastard, a typical artist type. As he began pushing the assortment of letters through the horizontal slot he heard the muttered words "About fucking time!". Steve's muscles froze and angry words formed a lump in his throat, ready to erupt that second to perform a vocal concerto as he battered the door down. But, he thought, whats the point, and tried to subside his anger. Halfway down the path he remembered that there was a large package for no. 23, a package that was kept in a separate bag with other large or fragile deliveries. He paused and withdrew the parcel. It was a large jiffy bag containing a book, with a multitude of repetitive stickers covering every available space on the envelope. It couldn't fail to catch your attention.

NEVER WORK EVER the simple message said in its playful mocking tones. This was the final nail in the coffin of a bad day. He thought about his shitty job and about the fact that his son had been getting up at 6.00 every morning to do a paper round to buy a bike that had now been stolen. Steve wondered what to do with the package when the door to no. 25 flung itself open and a miserable looking bloke stumbled out clutching a plastic bag and fastening up his coat. Even though this person looked like he'd had enough even at this early hour he still managed to greet Steve with a smile and a pleasant hello.

"Oh hi, anything for me in that bag?" asked Dean.
"Yes, only this" Steve replied, instictively handing him the package in his hand that should have been delivered to no. 23.

The neighbour seemed to brighten up immediately and slipped the parcel into his carier bag without pausing to examine it.

"Thanks, got to go or I'll miss my bus"

Steve felt better already. The brat at number 23 would probably get his parcel in the end, but not until this evening. And it could be put down to a genuine mistake.

Dean headed for the bus stop on the next street at a furious pace. The plastic carrier bag banged against his thigh, but for the meantime he had forgotten about this mystery package. Instead his mind kept going back to his nightmare. The Restart interview sequence was pretty much as it occurred in reality, however at the time Dean thought that Job Club would be ok as an option... better than going on a scheme or pretending to be setting yourself up in pine stripping on the Enterprise Allowance. And anyway, it would serve to take away some of the heat that he had been getting from the Claimants Officers. But Job Club had been a calamity, and nothing less. Two weeks of piss boring lectures on how to fill in application forms, and then an endless pile of really shitty vacancies thrust in front of you to apply for. And it would be just his luck that he'd end up with the shittiest job of the lot, working on the production line at a factory that made climbing equipment. He worked the machine that stitched together the slings used by climbers.

The boredom of the job was intense, and subsequently Dean could see no point in why people would want to climb anyway, it seemed a sport designed for yuppies who wanted to appear outrageous ro their yuppie mates. However, there was all types of hell at the factory this week, as the company had just landed a contract with a bunch of television people producing a series called 'Gladiamrs'. The company had given all their workers a letter exclaiming their great joy in landing such a contract, which was for a whole load of karabiners, clips, slings etc to be used in the series, which apparently featured men and women swinging around on ropes in combat, and sprinting up climbing walls with musclebound gorillas (gladiators) in hot pursuit. All the workers were asked to put in extra hours at short notice,-to make up this express order as quickly as possible. But the company had to be careful, it was a similar situation about 4 years ago that nearly resulted in the whole lot being closed down : they had rushed out an order of karabiners for a whacky stunt on Noel Edmonds 'Late, Late Breakfast Show' where a man was suspended upside down in a large box from the end of a crane. In the panic at the factory a batch of karabiners had gotten through without being safety checked, and when the pin failed in the vital karabiners holding Noel's poor sucker 50 foot above a concrete car park at the BBC, all hell broke loose...

The bus arrived and Dean settled down for the journey. If the job wasn't bad enough there was this bastard hour long bus ride to top it all off. He heaved his carrier bag onto his lap and then remembered the mystery package. He expectantly fumbled in the bag and produced the envelope. It was covered with these stickers proclaiming 'NEVER WORK EVER' and Dean realised that it couldnt possibly be for him as the creeps who send out junk mail would never print such a strange message. He looked at the address label 'INSUFFICIENT, c/o 23 Capital Boulevard, ...'. So that was it, it was for that smarmy git next door who always made a point of avoiding to speak to him. He thought he'd open it anyway just to relieve the boredom of the bus journey. He could always pass off his opening of it as a genuine mistake.

It contained a short letter asking for a review of the book, and the aforementioned book which had the grand title of 'Sabotage in the Workplace : A Manual of Ideas and Inspirations'. Dean's interest starting peaking and he quickly read through the introduction which explained how and why such a book had come into existence. There then followed absolutely loads of short tales about how boredom, authority and meaninglessness can be combatted, resulting in fun for workers and chaos for the bosses. There were even stories of single person actions contriving to shut down whole factories with the simplest of procedures, or of people enhancing their lives with pleasure, money or material goods.

Dean stepped off the bus at the factory and headed straight for the canteen to eat his butties. He had another half hour to kill before his 12 hour shift began. He didn't even bother with his customary hellos to the other workers on the production line or in the canteen. He just sat down in an isolated corner, concealed his book in a newspaper and got started again with his reading. Within the short time of coming across this mystery gift wonderful ideas were formulating.

Bill shuffled through his letters he'd received that morning, still pissed off that his review copy of 'Sabotage...' hadn't arrived as promised by the publisher. A Poll Tax demand had been ceremoniously thrown in the bin, a cheque from his mum was folded and placed in his building society book, and the remainder of the post lay strewn across his desk awaiting inspection. He squeezed the last few drops of a carton of soya desert into his throat, and turned the television off. The picture of Richard and Judy disappeared into microdot and Bill began to focus on his attempt at Fatal Strategies. Today would be the day. He scanned his desk. He had various small press magazines to review (nothing that caught his eye) and a couple of hopeful submissions for the next issue of 'Insufficient'. The first one went straight into the waste paper basket, yet another critique of the Art Strike... this was all old hat by now. The other article was more interesting, probably by the nature of its extreme obscurity : a critique of the classical thesis of alienation using a theoretical model of 2 protons in an unstable radioactive Uranium isotope. This was the type of stuff that made 'Insufficient' the leader in its field.

After filing his mail into its various destinations (work in progress, his library, waste paper bin) Bill began to prepare himself for his climbing trip later in the afternoon. The rock at Baudrillard buttress had dried fully and an assault on the route in the early hours of the morning yielded the largest probability of a success. This meant an overnight bivi at the crag, and so quite a bit of preparation to ensure maximum comfort and fitness for the route. He timetabled the afternoon to begin with a good stretching session and some light training to loosen his muscles, then he'd head off into town to tie up any outstanding business and hitch a ride out to the crag. It was about a 20 mile journey and Bill considered using his new bike to get there, but then thought better as he had not repainted the hot bike in question.

He selected some sounds and began his stretching. As the strains of Renegade Soundwave's 'Thunder' began to vibrate around the room he coiled himself up on his yoga mat. As the bass picked up he unfurled and pushed up on his arms to stretch his back into a curve. He began the process of uncluttering his mind to focus on the job at hand. The first thing that was in his mind was the good feeling he had from recalling the bike he had nicked last week, a new Cannondale 800, a real beautiful machine.

Steve was logging his claim with the insurance company for his son's nicked bike. It had been a long morning and Steve just wanted to get home and put some work into his allottment. However, he had 1 or 2 items of business to attend to, including dealing with these awkward bastards at the insurance office who seemed intent on giving him a hard time. The crux of the matter was that the bike was a bleedin' expensive machine, a top of the range Cannondale which had taken his son 18 months to save for. He would have gladly killed the scumbag who had nicked it.

At the factory the pace of things was in overdrive. This gladiators contract could mean the big boost for the climbing industry that the factory needed. All the workers were being promised the famous 'tomorrow cake' if they would all put in that bit of extra effort to complete this huge order. Dean had other thoughts - his mind was illuminated with stories of sabotage, of the unknown hero closing down whole factories with the simplest of tactics. The pit of anxiety that formed the bulk of his stomach whilever he was at work was slowly rising and lifting... it would all be so simple.

All it would take would be for Dean to remove a sling from the stitching machine and allow it to pass through the production line only attached by the glue. While it would appear as a good sling it would immediately fail the routine strength test that all the climbing equipment was religiously submitted to. This would entail the

whole of the production line being closed down for the afternoon where the errant machine was given a thorough checking over. He, and the rest of the workforce, could well be home by dinnertime.

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Bill strode through town tying up his loose ends before hitching out to the crag. He had to steer clear of the library as that was the scene of his last crime. He had been xeroxing some 'Information War' strategy documents that had ironically included a polemic about the tactical use of libraries and the importance of fighting to keep them open. What had caused the initial problem was Bill's dodgy forged card that he used to hack free photocopies - it would seem that he had used it one time too many and the knackered old photocopier had admitted defeat by totally short circuiting. He nipped behind the shelves as the sole member of staff, attending to a long queue of book borrowers, rushed over to silence the flashing, beeping, incapacitated machine. It was on his way out of the library main doors that Bill had seen the unlocked bike and quickly made himself scarce on it. He smiled to himself as he recounted this excellent tale. Bill's final port of call was his monthly visit to the local sports shop - he was a dab hand at shoplifting and this shop normally had a bit of climbing gear or posh clothing that found its way into Bill's holdall.

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Steve pushed open the pub doors. In many ways he felt ready to explode. His anger was boiling up inside of him like the pus in the spot on his shoulder where his heavy mail bag had been rubbing throughout his round. He wanted to avoid the temptation to get totally pissed as he really needed the time on his allottment. He decided on one pint as that would be enough to calm him down without ensuring that he dropped asleep as soon as he got home.

He ordered his pint and staked out the pub. It was busy with lunchtime drinkers, mainly loudmouths in suits bragging about their office triumphs or getting excited about banal office politics. A rowdy bunch in the far corner eventually caught his attention, and he immediately recognised them as the Militant cronies who had been creeping round all the local anti Poll Tax groups over the last few months. Their ringleader was a character called Black who was a loudmouth braggard at the best of times. Obviously Black was in high spirits. Steve didn't have to eavesdrop to hear the gory details : Black had been working hard and had collected a big monthly bonus which he was now blowing in the pub. Steve knew the nature of Black's work, and he knew that a bonus for Black meant a great deal of misery for many other people.

Black spotted Steve and made his way through the swarm of lunchtime bnozers.

"Hey, Mr. Postman" he cried "I have a special job for you"

Steve could smell the stale beer on the Trot's breath, and could see that this veritable Lenin was well pissed. On a normal day Steve would have just let it go, but today he was wound up and so he focussed a sharp gaze on the stumbling character. Black fumbled inside his jacket pocket and produced a pile of leaflets. He slapped them down on the table in front of Steve.

"Can you deliver these on your next round - secretly, like - it might give you something important to do for once."

The leaflets advertised a Militant meeting that proclaimed that they had defeated the Poll Tax and now they were wanting people to listen to how they were going to lead a revolution. Steve didn't even pick them up.

"What's up postie? Scared of acting out of line?"

Steve kicked the table aside sending some drinks, an ashtray, and the leaflets scattering over the pub floor. He stepped forward and grabbed the lapels of Black's coat. He thought of saying something but realised that the Militant was so pissed that he wouldn't even listen. Instead Steve steadied himself, cocked his head back, and then brought it forward with a tremendous force. The single, thunderous headbutt split Black's nose in one go.

As Black fell, his face erupting into a fountain of blood, his coat lapels flapped open to reveal a pristine suit and a large name lapel. The badge bore the logo for the Benefit's agency, and was flanked top and bottom by Black's name and Black's post : Restart Officer.

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At the factory Dean had almost forgotten about his ploy to close down the works for the afternoon. Whilst he knew that the knackered sling wouldn't have gone undetected he had assumed that the manager had been alerted and the decision would have been made to press on regardless to meet the demands of this huge order. What was probably worse was that the manager may have even suspected that the sling was deliberately sabotaged and that Dean was the one who had done it. So Dean's good feelings were short lived, and the pit of anxiety had returned to his stomach with a vengence, further bubbling up every time the shopfloor manager made his way towards Dean.

However, the sling had never even made it to the testing department. Pearson the delivery and transport worker didnt need coffee table books on sabotage to learn how to vent his alienation or to exploit the dispersed system of modern production to his own advantage. He knew spots in the factory where he could pick up pieces of climbing gear away from the prying eyes of the supervisors and the security cameras. He also had a list of clients who would give him good money for all of this knock-off gear. It wasn't so much sabotage - more a case of topping up a measly salary.

The sabotaged sling was nestling in a box of gear that Pearson intended to sell to the shop assistant at 'Real-Sports'. This was Pearson's main fence, partly because the shop assistant sold the gear on himself and so made quite a bit of money. As Pearson walked through the main doors of the shop with his box of goodies his partner in crime shot him an anxious look - it would appear that some high ranking manager was on the prowl and any dodgy business would obviously be spotted by this sharp witted stormtrooper. He dropped his box in a corner of the shop and winked visibly at his friend, then he made swift his exit remembering to return later and pick up the cash.

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Bill peered into the windows of Real-Sports and checked out the possibility for a bit of opportunist shoplifting. It seemed a pretty easy enough opportunity. The 2 members of staff were getting some kind of dusting down from some dimwit in a cheap and nasty suit, and there were a few zombified customers walking around amidst the bright lights and flickering video screens showing the throbbing and pulsating footage of a dangersports compilation video. The security here was pretty standard : no cameras or store detectives, but usually keen eyed staff and some security tags. As the staff seemed to be otherwise engaged Bill decided to go for it. The security tags could usually be ripped off by someone like Bill who possessed strong fingers, although some material didn't even have tags on. As Bill panned round the shop he spotted the box on the floor by the changing rooms. He immediately thought that this would be new stock and so it was highly likely to be untagged. He made his way to the box and peered in. He thought his luck was in when he saw the assortment of brand new climbing gear. Noting that it was all untagged, he crouched down and tipped the whole lot into his rucksack. He stood up and left the premises totally unseen.

The ride out to Cheedale was forgettable. A truckdriver who didn't have anything to say for himself, making a token conversation about football etc. Bill had intended to get a cup of tea at the local cafe but was met by a closed sign indicating that the proprietors had taken a weeks holiday. Bill cursed to himself and made a mental note to reprint his old rant about 'another cheap holiday in other peoples misery'. Consequently he reached the crag earlier than expected, and calculated that he had a couple of hours of daylight left. He decided to have a quick try at the route, just to practice the top moves. He climbed the footpath to the top of the crag and got himself seated by the belay tree. He fished in his bag amongst the new gear to get something to tie onto the tree. He pulled out a new sling and looped it round the bottom of the tree, and then selected a screwgate karabiner to clip his rope onto the sling. This would enable him to lower down to the uppermost bolt on the route and clip it. He tightened his harness and clipped the rope onto the sling, he took a deep breath and began to lower himself over the lip of the crag. One thought now occupied his mind - seeing his photograph on the front cover of the climbing magazines, and sensing the words 'Fatal Strategies' on the lips of climbers all over the country.

Easy Listening for the Hard of Hearing.

Whilst it appears that original concerns with 'progressive librarians' or those fighting for 'social change' are based around the related concepts of provision of an alternative voice on our shelves and databases, and the provision of any sort of voice in areas that are recognised as emerging (democratic) struggles I would like to take this opportunity to discuss wider aspects of the library as part of the praxis of a struggle and vision. In our predecessors words : to dare to dream.

In a previous work (1) I have sketched out notes for what could be called the 'content' of a library, and I think it is important to re-emphasise the thrust of those arguments before examining the 'form' of the library and its part in a possible praxis.

Our world is shaped by capitalism and its relentless pursuit of profit. The nature of capitalism implies an exploited working class, however you don't have to be poverty stricken or desperate for work to see the effects of capitalism. Whilst we can see the obvious effects of this on the degradation of our physical environment, it is also evident in our mental environment. Alienation and individualisation become accepted modes of living as social existence becomes carved into smaller and smaller chunks - control, surveillance, management and profit are what is extracted. Information society is thus a capitalist concept - in terms of the workplace it arose through taylorization, dispersed Fordism, subcontracting and whole new areas of finance industry (information brokers etc) (2), in terms of the social sphere it arose through the media, the development of lifestyleism and the relentless barrage of advertising culture. Concurrent to the 'qualitative' shift in capitalism are the tools and technologies to facilitate this - the capture, manipulation, presentation and communication of information. Whilst there is a theoretical gulf between this 'information spectacle' and the function of the local library as a tool for struggle, there is no doubt that library and information workers should be dialoguing in this area (my original article was prompted by a 'debate' in Progressive Librarian).

For instance, we are witnessing the penetration of information spectacle into the cultural terrain. This began with the construction of fictional characters such as 'Case' in William Gibson's cyber-trilogy which set up the stereotype of the swashbuckling Indiana Jones figure hacking and slashing their way through the corporate information jungle. The maverick nature of this characterisation has been a base of appeal for the internet and web culture, which has then grown on exploiting our alienated and individualised lives to bring us all that is violent, glib and glossy as pioneering in this field(3).

The 'form' of the library represents huge possibilities, and it has always intrigued me with its absence from revolutionary dialogue. At a very basic level revolutionary theory can be broken down into three categories:
(i) ANALYSIS of current society
(ii) VISION of a new society
(iii) STRATEGY to move from one to the other

This is not a simple molecular approach, and categories are related in how they influence each other (otherwise we wouldn't have the 57 varieties of opposition etc). Whereas there can be unscrupulous visions of the society we would like to live in, much of the difference is based upon analysis of current society. Thus people suggest we couldn't live in a world without money, or without a degree of centralised control, because of the nature of our behaviour in current society. Similarly there arises intricate and exact strategies based upon a specific analysis - for instance industrialist and unionist strategies that imply that we are not able to consciously think about what and how we produce and to make choices on the lives we want (I mean, c'mon, a plumber today can only think about being a plumber in a new society, surely?). Thus an analysis of current society must take into account the shaping motives (ie capitalism in terms of economic-deterministic-marxism) and the effects they have on the proletarian condition (ie the lesser-spotted-marx talking about subjective forces like alienation).

The form of the library could have incredible relevance in terms of the whole revolutionary process (analysis, vision, strategy)... these are only my personal observations. From analysis we can understand that current society involves an intense effort to prevent us from struggling pro-actively (the basis of autonomist theory). An important aspect of this is the mystification and specialisation of both skills and commodities that embody these 'mystified skills'. If we combine this with the increased drive towards commodity fetishism then it is possible to see a deadlock in achieving anything towards a true liberation. The library exists to break down the nature of specialisation in terms of the knowledge that is needed to understand and anain relevant skills. It also challenges directly the whole concept of commodity fetishism by giving an alternative to the tunnelvision of consumerism.

Of course I am not talking about a way to relieve the misery of capitalism by requesting a few more libraries, or a few more radical books, what is being discussed now is the construction of a vision. Here we can see how the elements of the revolutionary process are more inter-related ; a tangible and possible vision needs to be presented as part of a strategy and be relevant to our analysis of society. Thus it should tackle the problems that we see are relevant in the here and now with a revolutionary perspective.

Here's where we can dare to dream... I see the form of the library being crucial to the new society beyond the basis of educational and communicative uses. Many of the goods that we desire to own, have no possible hopes of producing or maintaining ourselves, and end up saving up for for years would be better organised in a library.

Of course, for a start, our lives would be enriched by the new social fabric that smashes the stranglehold of individualisation. As television vanishes because no-one can be bothered to watch re-runs and no-one can be bothered to make new police dramas we can have spectacular cinemas in our communities that facilitate feasting and rowdy behaviour (an end to cultural homage!). And so the need for commodities to compensate for the poverty of our social fabric would be thrown asunder. For example, I enjoy rockclimbing but would I be obliged to own a full set of expensive(ly produced) climbing hardwear. Commodities such as this can be used communally within the limits of safety, and a library form is the ideal 'management' system. This has further implications on the organisation of production of material goods that can help solve the debate between the advocation of smallest self managed communities and a larger centralised production system. Production of climbing hardwear could be utilised within the factories that used to serve this purpose and have physically survived the revolution (climbing proletariat would have to convince the once exploited shop floor workers not to burn the factory down in anger / celebration!) However, it is not necessarily those who are located geographically close to the factories who are obliged to work 365 days a year in them. Organisation (centralisation?) contains a balance of practicality and a balance of reflecting the social conditions of the new society. Thus, say, the climbing community of Sheffield could migrate to the factory for a 2 week 'holiday' where they would take part in producing the tools to facilitate the pursue of their pleasures and then replenish the local 'commodity' libraries in Sheffield.

This rather 'impractical' example is possibly reflecting the social organisation of society. Libraries could also be used to supply a ready resource of other items (cameras, VCRs, printing machinery, bicycles, tools, hot air balloons, sound systems, skuba diving equipment, cots and cradles,...) that required only maintenance and no 'demand' on their users to physically take part in producing them. Here we see the distinction between workplace and community dissolving and the only 'centralisation' arising from specific user groups such as us climbers etc (I do not see a fetish for centralisation arising from the fact that the cold climate of Sheffield is unsuitable for pineapple growing though I wish to enjoy pineapples in my diet - neither though would we require 'pineapple libraries'!).

Part of my strategy is in presenting this vision, in daring to dream, however there are things that could possibly be implemented now to facilitate the struggle - free shops, other libraries (toys etc), skill sharing (beyond the liberal martyrdom of LETS). These can exist alongside our efforts to fight for an education that stresses change and not compliance - a fight that is central to us as library and information workers. We should be prepared to talk about the relevance of what we are doing, and about our hopes and fears... this is what I am trying to do here.

References

(1) 'Information as Commodity and Strategies for its Negation' in Communist Headache #3.

(2) Useful material here is Negri's work on the socialised worker, however I can recommend the articles 'Technology and Class' and 'The City, Social Control and the Local State' both in Subversion #17 (from Dept 10, 1 Newton Street, Manchester, M1 1HW)

(3) Of course, documentation and resistance to this has been evident. It even reached cover status in the Guardian 30/1/96 with the story 'Distant Voices, Ill Lives'.

PROCESSED WORLD DOCUMENTS.

1. Letters Selection

Fellow Workers,

First of all I was pleased to receive the sample copy of *PW* you sent, although a few weeks later I received another copy along with a notice to renew my subscription. Thanks. I do like *Processed World* and have shown it to coworkers. They dig the graphics.

Anyway, I'm writing to briefly comment on some of the points you raised in your cover letter in order to clarify my views. You say that, "The mass, interchangeable nature of office work, and the enormous transiency among white collar workers indicates,..., that we have a different relationship to Work than the one which gave rise to the theory of Industrial Unionism." I think that you are mistaken. It was precisely the "mass, interchangeable nature" of labor that accompanied the aggregation of large numbers of workers in mass production industries that gave rise to the theory of Industrial Unionism in the first place. Prior to this development, production was carried on by relatively small groups of skilled craftsmen in small shops. Craft, or trade, unionism was the form of organization worked out by these skilled workers to meet the needs within the prevailing organization of labor. Similarly, industrial unionism developed to meet the needs of the mass worker created by the new organization of labor. Indeed, the IWW had its greatest successes among the migratory agricultural, timber, construction and mining workers of the West, whose way of life and work were much more transient than that of the "white collar" worker of today. This was because the concept of revolutionary class unionism made no hard and fast distinction among industries, seeing each particular industry as an integral part of an overall industry; i.e., the production and distribution of goods and services to meet the needs and wants of human beings. So, it didn't matter if you were harvesting wheat in August, cutting timber in September, or working on a dam in October, you were still part of the working class. The same goes for the white collar worker who might change jobs every six months.

The relationship of white collar workers, including "information handlers," to the production process is not all that different from that of blue collar workers. I'm a programmer. I write and maintain software. The software I write and maintain is decided on by my employer. I do not own the means of production (i.e., the terminal I use or the CPU that it's attached to), nor the product (i.e., the program) of my toil. How is this different from the situation of, let's say, a millwright in a factory? None that I can see.

You may be right, self-identity may very well be found outside the workplace, and the worker identity, at least among the people you hang with, but to my mind this is not a good thing. I identify myself as a worker because it is the one thing that connects me, a moderately well-paid skilled worker, with the low paid key-puncher in order processing, the mail clerk, the guy who picks up my garbage, the woman who sews the soles on my sneakers AND that separates me from my, and their, bosses. If I were to identify myself as an artist, philosopher, or whatever, these other workers would be merely other "people" whose conditions of life and work would be of no interest to me except, perhaps, as objects of pity if their conditions were particularly harsh or as objects of envy if their conditions were appreciably better than my own. There would be no basis for solidarity. This would lead me to remain indifferent, or even hostile, to a particular group of workers who were engaged in a struggle with the employers. As a worker I see that, though our work and levels of compensation may be different, we are in the same position in relation to the work we do—powerless and expropriated—and that the way to put an end to this common wage-slavery is to organize ourselves in opposition to those who hold the power and rob us of the wealth we create.

PW emphasizes the voices of contemporary workers as writers, artists, poets, historians, philosophers, etc., and that's a good thing. *The Industrial Worker*, on the other hand, emphasized the voices of contemporary workers as workers, or it should to my mind. This is important so that we can resist being sucked into the belief that we workers and our employers are all part of one human race with identical interests and that if we'll just try to cooperate, we'll all be better off.

The contemporary collapse of business unionism (both trade and industrial) is due, I think, primarily to the restructuring of the capitalist economies and the increased stratification of the working class that has been produced. In this situation, I think that the IWW's concept of revolutionary class unionism is most relevant. To realize this concept it will be necessary to create communities of resistance both within and without the workplace that aim at the abolition not of "Work," but of wage labor. It seems to me that before we can get rid of all the useless work we do, we have to get possession of the decision-making power to determine, collectively, what is and what is not useful and necessary work. This will take organization and struggle, an organization and struggle that will not happen if those who want to see the abolition of this society take the path of escape into marginal, self-managed businesses. As the saying goes, "If not us, who? If not now, when?"

Well, I think I've gone on long enough. I hope all this clarifies my views, for what they are worth. I'll sign off now and wish you well.

In solidarity,
M.H.—Chicago, IL

Dear M.H.,

Thanks a lot for your thoughtful response. I had begun to despair of intelligent dialogue resulting from sending out my letter. I expected to receive a number of highly critical letters, but didn't.

On this question of "mass interchangeability" and its relation to self-identity and work, I agree with your invocation of the historical experience of Wobbly organizing among far poorer, far more marginal workers in a broad range of occupations some 80 years ago. I was trying to find some discussion of how transience affected organizing in the IWW anthology or some other old literature but failed to find anything. It seems that the working class identity was so profound and clear at that time that it wasn't necessary to worry about highly transient workers failing to see their common predicament as workers. And of course, as I'm sure you know, the immigrant communities that largely sustained Wobbly organizing, were tightly knit and often had dynamic periodicals and frequent cultural gatherings which sometimes became integral to strikes and other Wobbly campaigns. So I would argue that while early twentieth century industry introduced the mass worker role, the late twentieth century is suffering the psychological harvest of decades of mass work and just as important, mass consumption. We no longer think of ourselves as workers. You say you are a programmer and do still see yourself in your proletarian status. I am a self-employed typesetter and graphic artist and also identify with workers and a working class movement. But I am painfully aware of how empty that sounds to others not already sharing such a perspective; in fact it sounds as distant and alien as the exhortation of Christians to get saved!

So that's what we're trying to do in PW, find a new language and new connections not dependent on (rightly or wrongly) discredited categories and language. I hope it's still clear that we are in favor of workers' self-organization and the abolition of wage-labor! You argue that the basis of solidarity is a shared self-identity as "worker." I really doubt it. Solidarity is born out of practical necessities more than any psychological self-conceptions. But if the practical links between different kinds of work remain opaque, and everyone is just "people," practical struggles remain remote. So how to proceed? Why should we spend our energies encouraging people to define themselves as their job, one of the worst pillars of the work ethic? I think almost all workers have something better to do than their jobs, and that's what a radical workers' movement should be emphasizing. Might there be some way to tap the reservoirs of creativity and community, to excite people based on their desires for a more fully human life (which is why so many think of themselves as musicians, historians, dancers, photographers, etc.)? Wobblies should advocate using the social power on the job to achieve this more complete life. I think this approach will resonate with people as they are living now, exploiting the widespread stifling of creative capacities by the capitalist system.

I think you make a real mistake when you identify my choice to make a living in an environment of my own creation (at least compared to a bank!), where I have much more control over the hours worked, the way the work is done, and even sometimes what kind of work I do, as an "escape." Sure, it is an escape from the worst kind of totalitarian nightmare, the sort which prevails in large corporations. But it is no escape from the basic logic of our lives, the incessant buying and selling. Finally, the escape of self-employment is also the acceptance of a much less mediated relationship with the marketplace, hardly an embrace of freedom.

I want to engage in resistance that's fun! I don't know if you think that's weak of me, or frivolous, or whatever, but I think pleasure is our best weapon, and we have to fight for it all the time, in every arena, especially political/social/industrial opposition.

I think the widespread rejection of the worker identity is extremely healthy, raising the interesting question of how do we organize and use our collective social power on a different basis with perhaps more far-reaching goals than merely, as the IWW Preamble has it, "organiz[ing] the army of production... to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown." A free future seems to me to preclude concepts such as an "army of production," irrespective of its goals. The demise of the worker identity and its replacement by a new individualism is at worst ambiguous. I see no hope in trying to

convince people who have tried very hard to find a creative role in life (usually without any hope of making a living that way, e.g. photographers, writers, etc.) to reconceptualize their lives on the basis of a meaningless job which they will only be at for a couple of years at most. When they are transient and move to a new place, it's usually an attempt to find work at their creative goals, not to resume whatever alienated office job they are leaving behind. But their engagement with the possibilities of their lives is more profound than the 40-hour-a-week worker at any kind of job. And we need people with the passion that gets them more involved with their lives and makes them unwilling to accept the tawdry choices left us by late capitalism. Individualism is a good beginning, and provides an opportunity for us to promote the kind of social responsibility and mutual aid that, combined with self-motivated, responsible individuals, can actually bring forth a different way of life.

Since you identify as a worker, and do computer programming, how do you relate to the purpose of your work now? I assume it's largely useless, but I'd be curious to know how you see it. And what is the role of millions of bank, insurance, and real estate workers in a liberated division of labor? What is useful information? How should we go about organizing that? How will bank workers who (hypothetically) organize themselves and expropriate Bank of America, say, feel about the abolition of said institution and the elimination of all that information? Mightn't they feel they should fight to save their jobs? Don't we have to find a way out of that loop? By continuing to insist on embracing work and workers, as such, we reinforce people's dependence on this abstraction known as The Economy, when really it's high time to make a break with this totally obsolete organization of society.

I know it's all pretty embryonic and far from figured out. More dialogues are really important right now.

Thanks again for your intelligent response. It came as a great relief to me, and helps restore some of my (admittedly limited) faith in the IWW. I look forward to further exchanges.

Best wishes,
Chris Carlsson

2. Article : What Work Matters?

The Labor Movement has stopped moving. Institutions, primarily AFL-CIO trade unions, long ago replaced workers as the "active" part of the "movement." In the past two decades unions and organized workers have been completely outflanked by the widespread restructuring of work through automation and relocation. This institutional legacy of earlier struggles is incapable of reconceptualizing the nature of social opposition; to expect otherwise is naïve.

What do we want and how do we get it?

We want to take back our labor. It's ours, and we want to decide what society does! It is strategically disempowering—dare I say "stupid"—to begin from the premise that our revolutionary activity must rest on our subordinate positions. Trying to get improved wages or conditions within an absurd, toxic and wasteful division of labor over which no one has any meaningful control is to pursue a future of childlike dependenee on either rulers or the abstraction known as The Economy. What is The Economy? It is all of us doing all this work—a lot of it a waste of time! But the media tells a different story: we are chided for lacking "eonsumer confidence" and scolded for "hurting The Economy," or perhaps we are counseled that "it's bad right now," as though The Economy was suffering a transient medical problem that will pass just like a cold.

Government as we know it is a major part of the problem, not because it stands in the way of business and the market, but because it offers them the ultimate guarantee of force, and has proven its willingness to act. Unions are also part of this. They have clear legal responsibilities, primarily negotiating and upholding legal contracts with large companies, ensuring "labor peace"; they cling to the law, hoping that eventually the government will change the laws and then enforce them to allow a new wave nf unionization. They imagine that they will someday be allowed back in the club and once again enjoy a piece of an expanding economic pie as they did during the post-war period, when they played an important role in crafting U.S. foceign and domestie policies by purging radicals and communists and becoming ardent cold warriors.

Labor-management cooperation succeeds when there is increasing wealth to divide up at the bargaining table, and workers are content to exchange control ovec their wock for increased purchasing power. Those days are gone forever. The U.S.'s much-vaunted "high standard of living"—the trough at which trade unionism has fed its formerly fat face so vocaciously—is sinking fast.

Falling living standards are no accident. The effect of expanding international trade is to gradually equalize wages and working conditions worldwide. The demise of union strength, attributable in part to the emergence of this world market with its billions of low-wage workers, is also in part a result of unions themselves. Union bureaucrats who have helped pursue the imperialist policies of the U.S. through the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) and campaigns for "democratic unions" have contributed to a process which has already greatly increased "Third World" conditions in U.S. cities.

The reduction of high-wage industrial work in favor of low-wage, part-time service and information work was in response to the equalizing forces of the world market. As capital flnws to areas of optimal profitability, living conditions worsen in its wake, creating a two-tiered sociсty that signals misery for the majority. It is a process that cannot be derailed by an "honest" or even "progressive" government enmeshed in the unforgiving world market. Union leaders who campaign for "jobs" are either cynics or genuinely myopic. They know as well as anyone who reads the daily papers that the wave of restructuring that helped produce this "downturn in The Economy has permanently reduced the number of workers needed.

Today people band together as workers and take action when they are attacked and enraged, nr desperately frightened (and not always then). By the time they are pushed to this extreme, a large team of lawyers and managers has already been planning for months or years on using management's strategic power to increase control and profits. Workers' actions under union (and legal) control invariably correspond closely to the script being written by the company lawyers.

Of course no one expects radical ideas from union leaders, whose primary concerns are personal survival, pensions, their kids' college tuitions, etc. As every wave of layoffs, automation and concessions hurls more people into the daily transience and uncertainty that increasingly characterize daily life in the U.S., union bureaucrats merely seek long-term guarantees for themselves as institutional players at the Table of Consensus. Any contract will do, as long as the dues keep getting checked off. Maybe they'll have to "tighten their belts," lay off a secretary or two.

For these reasons a new wave of social opposition must identify its strategic concerns as distinct from those of unions. Those that do the work should assume comprchensive control, through their own activity, of their (our) work, their purposes, and organization. Workers bave to begin thinking beyond the logic of the system in which they find themselves entrapped.

Time at the paid job is akin to "jail" versus the "freedom" of time after work. Work is war. If it's only a game now, it's because it's so difficult to seriously challenge the power and designs of the owners and their representatives.

Many people already pursue activities and "work" that they rarely, if ever, get paid for. In spite of the lack of "demand" for this "work," they put serious committed energy into developing various talents, skills, or tendencies because their engagement with life demands it—the satisfaction of their full humanity depends on it! What if the passion that leads us to become musicians or artists, or to pursue "second careers," or "pay our dues" in the fields we are interested in, were unleashed to redesign life itself?!

As the people who "have better things to do than work," we have to develop our sense of self-interest, in stark opposition to the consensus for a "strong economy." Tactics to expand our freedom RIGHT NOW will become clearer as we share what we already know about points of vulnerability, openings and

spaces, creative obfuscation, unfettered self-expression, utopian fantasizing, and *living well now*. Sometimes we'll find allies at work, other times the pursuit of our goals may need "outside help."

Given the sweeping changes of the past two decades (computerization and just-in-time production to name but two examples), the fear of losing increasingly scarce jobs, and the thorough amnesia that afflicts U.S. workers, liberals, and even radicals, it seems unlikely that social movements that break with the logic of the marketplace will arise *on the job*. However, such movements will still face the question of work.

THE DUALISM OF WORK

The French writer Andre Gorz has argued that the extreme socialization of modern industry and its reduction of human labor to completely controlled machine-like behavior has eliminated the once radical vision of true workers' control of industry and society. The way most work is structured in the global factory precludes the possibility of a collective appropriation of the means of production. In other words, "taking over" this messed-up world and running it "democratically" is neither truly possible nor desirable. A more thoroughgoing transformation of human activity and society will be required. To look at institutional solutions at the state level or its opposite, is to gaze into the past. Those ideas were born embedded in a division of labor and social system that has consistently promoted extreme centralization, stratification, and hierarchy based on power, wealth, race and gender.

If it is hopelessly anachronistic to believe in the possibility of One Big Union, or even a good government, how do we democratically organize our lives? What does democratic organization really mean? How come when we "talk politics" we don't talk about real issues like what do we do and why? How can we "freely participate" in a system of highly socialized labor and creatively redesign the fabric of our lives at the same time?

The marketplace and wage-labor impose a fatal break between our inclinations and duties. We are objects cast about in the rough seas of the market, rather than thoughtful subjects considering the zillions of ways in which our lives could be better immediately, and organizing ourselves to help bring it about. We are locked into "careers," or perhaps vicious cycles of underemployment, unemployment and bad luck, instead of choosing from a smorgasbord of useful activities needing attention, from cooking, cleaning and caretaking, to planting and building, along with a variety of well-stocked workshops for easy "self-production" of essential items.

Why isn't it a common discussion among people that life is so dismal when it could be so fine?

Perhaps we can get something from Gorz's concept of dualism at work. It's a dualism we already face, but relatively unconsciously. On the one hand, there are certain basic tasks that must be done "efficiently" to accommodate basic human needs worldwide—clean water and sewage treatment, sustainable agriculture, adequate shelter and clothing, and so on. On the other, are the countless ways humans have developed to satisfy themselves and improve life, from culture and music to home improvements and do-it-yourself-ism. In today's society, this dualism is experienced as an unavoidable division between what we do to "make a living," and what we do when work is over and we are "free." Of course, that "free" time is most often defined by the flipside of alienated work, i.e. shopping, or other forms of alienated consumption. Nevertheless, it is outside of work that most of us construct the identities that we really care about and that give us our sense of meaning.

Calling what we do as work now "necessary labor" is a confusing misnomer in our society since millions of jobs are a waste of time at best. But if a social movement arises with enough strength to create new ways of social life, then the activities that belong on the list of "necessary labor" could ultimately be decided upon by a new, radically democratic society. Once these tasks are identified and agreed upon, we can go about the business of reducing unpleasant work to a minimum, making it as enjoyable as possible, and sharing it as equally as possible.

Such a new society would eliminate billions of hours of useless work required by The Economy, from banking to advertising, from excessive packaging to unnecessarily wide distribution networks, from military hardware and software to durable goods built to break down within a few years or even months. Hundreds of areas of human activity can be drastically reduced, altered or simply eliminated.

Imagine how easy it would be to take care of medical problems if there were no money or insurance, merely the provision of services to those who needed them. There would still be medical record-keeping, but it would only track information for health needs, not information to be used for the pernicious ends of insurance disqualification or other standard business crimes. Hospitals would take care of people, not process insurance forms, imagine! With the elimination of so imagine! With the elimination of so much wasted effort and resources, real needs become much easier to meet. Material security is guaranteed to all. (There's plenty to go around already—but thanks to the market most of us can't afford much.)

With this kind of revolution the wrong-headed demand for "jobs" vanishes into thin air. Instead we are overwhelmed (at least at first) by all the work we need to do to create this new free society—a great deal of it involving the development of many new forms of social decision-making and collective work.

When we get things more or less the way we like them our "necessary labor" will fall to something like an easy five hours a week each. Our free time then stretches out before us with almost unlimited possibilities. Most of us will get involved in lots of different things. As people begin "working" at all the things they like to do, under their own pace and control, society discovers the pleasant surprise that "necessary labor" is shrinking since so much of what people are doing freely is having the effect of reducing the need for highly socialized, machine-like work.

Juliet Schor has discovered some interesting statistics in her book *The Overworked American* (See review on page 58). A 1978 Dept. of Labor study showed that 84% of respondents would willingly exchange some or all of future wage increases for increased free time. Nearly half would trade ALL of a 10% pay increase for free time. Only 16% refuse free time in exchange for more money.

In spite of overwhelming sociological evidence of a widespread preference for less work and more fun, many people still fervently clutch the work ethic. For them the connection between working and getting paid, earning your own living, is deeply ingrained as a basic element of self-respect. This sense of self-respect is extremely vital knowledge for human happiness, but somehow capitalism managed to link it to *wage-labor*. They want us to express our self-respect through our ability to do *their work, on their terms*. We deserve respect, from others and from ourselves, but not because we can do stupid jobs well. When that happens our self-respect has been bought and sold back to us as a self-defeating ideology.

Nobody ever does anything that is truly "theirs." Every part of human culture and daily life, especially work, is a product of millions of people interacting over generations. The fact that some individuals invent things or "have ideas" that become influential, doesn't make those breakthroughs any less a social product. That inventor's consciousness is very much a product of the lives and work of all those around him or her, present and past.

If this is true, then what is the basis for enforcing the link between specific kinds of work and specific levels of access to goods? In other words, why do some people make so much more money than others? More interesting still, in a society freed from the mass psychosis known affectionately as The Economy, what relationship do we want to establish between work, skill, initiative, longevity, etc. and *access to goods?*

Obviously I'm not arguing for comparable worth, or any strategy that gears itself to simple wage increases as a goal. In the exchange of wages for work we lose any say over what work is done and why; at this point in history we must redesign how we live, and we have to do it intelligently or we will surely not survive as a human civilization (it's barbaric enough already!).

A prosperous global society that is not dominated by a world government *and* is fun to live in, *and* doesn't require an abstract devotion to work for its own sake, is within our grasp. We have to think about the social power that still lies at work in spite of our desire to transform it into something quite different. If we are not organizing ourselves on the basis of our jobs, how do we begin to make real an alternative movement based on what we do value? How can this new "labor movement"

grow organically out of our efforts to subvert the current system?

The unions, from conservative to "radical," still believe in and insist on the centrality of the work ethic. They cannot conceive alternatives to the work-and-pay society because as institutions, unions are embedded within and defined by that society. Radicals clinging to the security blanket of "workers' organizing" (especially in the hopeless direction of rank-and-file trade unionism) are embrzcing a dying society and its obsolete division of labor. Why pursue at this late date the stabilizztion and maintenance (let alone improvement!) of a deal with capitalism, when it's clearer than ever that we need deep, systemic change that goes beyond mere "economics"?

Never has it been more appropriate to plaee on the front hurner the classic critiques of wage-labor and capitalist society. The work ethic is a perverse holdover from the worst extremes of the narrow puritanism that contributed greatly to the founding of this culture. The compulsion to work—for its own sake and as an ideological catile prod—is the battery acid that keeps this society afloat even while it leads to widespread corrosion within our hearts, relationships, and neighborhoods.

Although I attack the work ethic, I do not attack hard work. Without douht, a free society will be a great deal of work, involving hoth the free, creauive and fun stuff, and a fair share of the grind-it-out rehahhing, reconstructing, and reinhahiting of our ciues and countrysides. People are not afraid or incapable of hard, worthwhile work. Even the most onerous tasks can be made more enjoyable. Many, if not most, enjoy work, in reasonable and self-managed doses. But few are zble or willing to give that passionate extra effort when they are being paid m do a job all their lives. Degradation accompanies being left out of basic decisions about how you spend your life, and perpetually being told what to do.

Most of us go through life without finding meaning or satisfaction at wnrk, or if we're really lucky, we get some in small amounts now and then. The good things that happen zt work in this society are almost invariably IN SPITE of the organization, its activities, and the way it's run. When real human connections are made and real needs fulfilled, that is the essence of what all work should he. Of course it will be difficult to feel that way ahout lots of important things, like tending toxic waste dumps. But society's goal, and the target of a new social oppositinn, shculd be a good life for everyone. An ecologically sound material abundance, based on non-mandatory but widely shared short work shifts at democratically determined "necessary iaoor," is possihle right now.

The forms of our political zctivity and direct resistance must take seriously the hasic questions of social power. It's pretty obvious who's got the guns and that they're comfortable using them. We'll never win a military conflict. Pleasure is our strongest weapon. Life could he so great! Symbolic efforts may he useful at first, but if we are serious about radical change we will eventually have to grasp the levers of power found at work.

—*Chris Carlsson*

3. Interview with Judi Bari (A Shitraiser Speaks)

Judi Bari was born in Baltimore in 1949. She attended the University of Maryland, where she majored in anti-Vietnam War rioting. Since college credit is rarely gioen for such activities, Judi was soon forced to drop out of college with a political education but no degree. She then embarked on a 20-year career as a blue collar worker. During that time she became active in the union movement and helpcd lead two strikes—one of 17,000 grocery clerks in the Maryland/D.C./Virginia area (unsuccessful, smashed by the union bureaucrats) and one (successful) wildcat strike against the U.S. Postal Service at the Washington D.C. Bulk Mail Center.

In 1979 Judi moued to Northern California, got married and had babies. After her divorce in 1988, she supported her children by working as a carpenter building yuppie houses out of old-growth redwood. It was this contradiction that sparked her interest in Earth First!

As an Earth First! organizer, Judi became a thorn in the side of Big Timber by bringing her labor experience and sympathies into the environmental mouement. She built alliances with timber warkers while blockading their operations, and named the timber corporations and their chief executive afficers as being responsible for the destruction of the forest.

In 1990, while on a publicity tour for Earth First! Redwood Summer, Judi was nearly killed in a car-bomb assassination attempt. Although all euidencc showed that the bornb was hidden under Judi's car seat and intended to kill her, police and FBI arrested her (and colleague Darryl Cherney) for the bombing, saying that it was their bomb and they were knowingly carrying it. For the next eight weeks they were subjected to a police orchestrated campaign in the national and local press to make them appear guilty af the bombing. Finally the district attorney declined to press charges far lack of evidence. To this day the police have conducted no serious investigation of the bombing, and the bomber remains at large.

Crippled for life by the explosion, Judi has returned to her home in the redwood region and resumed her work in defense of the forest. She and Darryl are also suing the FBI and other police agencies for false orrest, presumption of guilt, and civil rights oiolations. Judi now lives in Willits, Califarnia with her two children.

Chris Carlsson: Where do you stand on the Work Ethic?

Judi Bari: Totally against it. It is absolutely sick!

CC: What do you think of as "human nature" when it comes to work and useful activities? How does the existing order encourage or obstruct this "nature"? How does workplaee organizing tap into this "nature"?

JB: I think people like to work if work is not alienated, not artificially construed by the system that makes it pure hell, that goes against every instinct. But I think that work, meaning like what you need to do to provide sustenance, that in itself as a concept is not something that people mind. I think that working ridiculous amounts of hours including 8 a day or 40 a week is not "natural," but I think working is something that's natural and enjoyahle and I think that without any work people in general would not feel comfortable. But work needs to be completely redefined from what it is right now. Now it is pure oppression. What did you say, 80% of work is unnecessary? Absolutely TRUE! Not only is it absolutely unnecessary, but the method hy which it's organized is horrible. It goes against everything, you have to suppress every instinct of enjoyment that you have in your being to go and put yourself in one of these stupid jobs. [laughter]

CC: And workplace organizing?

JB: Hey it makes work fun. I only had one joh when I actually liked the joh itself and that was being a carpenter. I enjoyed the job, I enjoyed heing able to build something that was beautiful and I was proud of myself for heing ahle to read the plans and figure it out. But all the other jobs I had I hated. Physically standing at a cash register, or unloading a truck or whatever, or standing at a bottling line, making the same motion over and over all dzy long. The johs totally sucked, but organizing was really fun. It gave me something to think about and do at work. I'm not szying "would the end result of organizing under capitalism be an enjoyahle job?" — No! We have to completely rearrange the way we work and what we call work before it would be enjoyahle. But what do we do in the meantime while we're waiting for the revolution? The only way tn be able to stand a job is to raise shit there. That's just personal experience, that's not political theory. [lzughter]

I [had] a job at a post office factory. Everybody worked under one roof and the conditions were outrageous. It was 85% black, mostly from the inner city, right across the Maryland line in the inner suburhs. We didn't even bother with any of the three different unions or their meetings. We did direct action on the workroom floor, put out an outrageous newsletter [Postal Strife] that was real funny, lampooning management. We weren't allowed to strike against the government, that was illegal and we'd get fired, so we had a "walk-in" where we met on hoth shifts and walked into the manager's office. We had sick-outs and slow-downs and trash-ins and sabotage days, and we got contrnl of the whole factory—it also took about one-and-a-half years. It peaked in a wildcat strike which was actually successful.

[Postal Strife] wasn't just reporting on things... it was instigating things.

When we first started to get power, at one point "Miz Julie" decided to be generous and offer us all a Xmas party. So on company time we were forced to attend this party. We weren't allowed to go outside and smoke pot or to go out to lunch, and this was her big generous thing. Then it turned out that it was illegal, because on company time she wasn't allowed to do that because we would have to work all this overtime because the machinery didn't work, so she was going to get in a lot of trouble. So she changed her mind and decided it was off the clock, and she was going to dock us all for two hours because she had forced us to go to this party. People were really pissed. She called in the union to break the news to them, to tell them "this is the problem, and what can we do about it?" and the union rep said "oh, it's ok, you can have the hour." But then Miss Julie realized that that wouldn't mean anything. So she did something completely illegal in a plant with a recognized bargaining unit, she called in the leaders of Postal Strife [our newsletter/group] because she knew that if we didn't agree to it that it wasn't going to fly. We came in as dirty as we could and sprawled on her white couches. She said she wanted her hour back, and we said "well, what are you going to give us? How about 15 minute breaks?" We had no authority to bargain at all. So she said, "OK, I can't officially give you 15 minute breaks but unofficially we won't make you go back, we'll give you an extra 5 minutes, but it'll be under the table." We said we can't talk for people on the shop floor, and we had to talk to them and see what they would say. So we walk out. Then she discovers that she's made another mistake: it's totally illegal to bargain with us when there's an exclusive bargaining agent. So she's pleading with us not to tell anyone, and we wrote the whole story up and drew a picture of her crying, "please give me my hour back!" [laughter] We really began to erode their power and gain power way before we gained official power.

CC: That's a question I always find interesting. Don't you think there's actually more power at that moment than what you had with formal control?

JB: No, the most power we got was afterwards, because first we did this actual real work—there was a peak and an ebb—first there was this peak of real live worker control because—We had a quote of the month in the paper, which was "the way I look at overtime, is the first 8 hours I got to put up with them, the last 2 hours they got to put up with me." That really was the truth. They couldn't get anyone to do any work on overtime, and not much the rest of the day when they were giving us overtime. One time the safe was locked (with our paychecks) and we were on night shift, and the only key was at Miss Julie's house, she lived in Virginia, so we formed a posse in the middle of the workroom floor, and we were about to walk out and drive to her house at 11:30 at night, and they suddenly found the key. [laughter] We had real raw power, OK? When we had the strike and after we walked out on strike the union fell apart and we got the control of the union. That's when we really got power. Then we had the official power, and the respect of the workers, which was based on real direct action and real self-empowerment, so we started substantially changing the working conditions, including sneaking a Jack Anderson reporter in, and got two national articles written about the place.

I didn't have to work anymore. I used to spend my whole day on the shop floor. I used to have to sneak out to do these little things, but then when I was Shop Steward I could spend the whole day, 8 hours a day, raising hell, it was great! I got paid for it! We really changed the working conditions, we changed the personnel, and they weren't getting away with shit. And what happened is that the working conditions got better.

I was the Chief Shop Steward and the coalition began settling for things and selling out and things began to fall apart, so now we worked 40 hours a week instead of 60-80, the supervisors weren't as nasty to us, it wasn't as dangerous and the new people that came in started to be more conservative. Some of the real radicals started to be less radical. I knew, the manager didn't know, but I knew that we no longer had the support on the shop floor. So I was living on a shell, I could get this guy to give up grievances because he thought that I could mobilize the workroom floor with the snap of a finger. The fact is I couldn't anymore, because people had gotten way conservative because working conditions were better. I quit to move to California before he figured out that we didn't really have rank and file power anymore. But we really did, and the peak was when we assumed official power after the strike, before it got so soft that people got conservative.

CC: In retrospect, do you imagine you should have gone in a different direction after you got official power to avoid this "bourgeois-ification"?

JB: I don't know. The problem is that our goals were limited. It doesn't matter how good we were, the biggest thing we were asking for was better working conditions for our factory that employed 800 people. We weren't asking to overthrow the wage system, we didn't have a political context in which we were operating, other than using very radical tactics to win workers' demands. Maybe it would have moved someplace else, maybe another factory that we were working with, or maybe it would be another issue, but we would have had to have some kind of thing that went beyond those narrow demands.

CC: Because those are satisfiable, essentially?

JB: Yeah, without changing the basic problem, y'know, which is this whole industrial organization, etc.

CC: Did you keep in touch with this place after you left? Did they go through a big wave of automation and restructuring?

JB: I still have some friends there, but no, it's still the same old machinery. They combined some of the functions, but it's basically the same structure. All of the gains that were made were all lost. The bulk mail wave of restructuring was in the '70s, I don't know what happened in the '80s except that we lost all the gains. All the bulk mail centers had these really bad working conditions, and throughout the history of them there were lots of spontaneous walkouts, that never led to better conditions. The difference was that our effort did. There were 3 places that went on strike when we did: New York, Richmond California and us, and we were the only ones that didn't get fired. The rest of them all got fired. They lost their demands. Since we were not even part of a larger postal group, we weren't even part of a TDU [Teamsters for a Democratic Union]. We were just a single factory, we communicated with the other ones that went on strike, but there wasn't any larger organization at all, there wasn't even a way of spreading it throughout the postal workers, much less expanding it to larger demands. I think that's one of the reasons why it was so easy and successful, is that it was such a small movement with limited demands. But that doesn't mean it wasn't a good thing to do because it gave people the experience of successful collective action, probably the first in their lives.

CC: Maybe their last.

JB: Yeah, right. Now it's this legend, this thing that happened in the past, and everything settled back to the way it used to be... and the postal workers have lost a lot of ground. The postal workers had a nationwide wildcat strike. It was the most recent nationwide wildcat and that's when they won collective bargaining rights, believe it or not, it was 1970. They didn't even have integrated unions in 1970. The US Post Office had a black union and a white union! Isn't that amazing? There was a spontaneous rebellion against really bad conditions, but back in 1970 the postal workers had a lot of power, a lot more than they knew, because at any one time 25% of the U.S.'s monetary supply was tied up in the mail, OK? When they called in the Army to break the strike (the postal workers have an inordinate number of Army veterans because they give you a 10 point preference on the test if you're a veteran), a lot of them were sympathetic because of the other Army people that worked there. So the Army people that were brought in—well, the workers sabbed [sabotaged] the stuff as much as they could, and a lot of the Army people contributed to sabbing it, and fucked everything up. So they got really fucked up in a very short time, it was like a one week strike, and the whole mail was tied up in knots, and a big piece of the monetary supply, so they had to settle the strike, and they recognized bargaining power in 1970 for a national union. I don't know of any other national union that was first recognized in 1970, or even anywhere near that. Now, with fax machines and electronic funds transfer, the postal workers have much less economic power than they did in 1970. They wouldn't even have the capacity to pull off such a strike if they wanted to.

CC: Get ready for the privatization of mail.

JB: Oh, absolutely!

CC: The fact is that most of what we do is a waste of time. Our politics has to really emphasize the uselessness of work. That has to be upfront.

JB: We really do our political work in different cultures. Yours is one that is at the forward end of the techological bullshit, in the evolution of the society from industrial to technological. But I'm working with retro, with what's left of the old industrial proletariat. So I think there's different value systems at play. The work ethic is very important. One of the reasons why the timber workers will relate to me more than most environmentalists is because they know I am by career a blue collar worker. The idea of not working is really offensive to them, in fact, that's the big thing they always say to the hippies, "why don't these people get a job?" So what do we say? "Cut your job, get some hair!" [laughter] I live in a place where they shaved hippies' dreadlocks in jail, I mean, what year is this? We're living in a time warp. Really, we're talking about different centuries here, certainly different decades.

Med-o: Chris and I have talked about this a lot: How do you organize people to get rid of their jobs? How do workers get organized with their main purpose to eliminate their jobs?

JB: There needs to be some other vision of what there is to do. I don't really see us at that stage yet. We know this is wrong. We know that this is NOT it, whatever it is, it's not this. [laughter] And I think people can relate to that, and it gives them room for their own creativity. I think I have a problem with organizers feeling like they have to have all the answers, NOW. Part of the problem is that we have to think collectively and figure it out, and it has to be based on our collective experience. And we haven't even had that experience yet!

CC: How do you feel about the average person's ability to participate in a process like that? I think everybody's got a great capacity for thought, but I don't think very many people have much experience or practice or natural native talent for cooperative group processes.

JB: Well, I don't know about native talent, it's certainly been bred out of us. It's a problem trying to organize in this society—I don't think there's ever been a society as brainwashed as this one. The whole workplace, the way it's set up is designed to make you into an automaton. It's hard but those little glimmers that we do get ARE so much more fun and so much more fulfilling than anything anybody's done in their life.

CC: A lot of time the things that cause people to band together in union, whether it's a legal institution or not (I personally favor the informal approach)—I think a lot of times the impulses that get people motivated to take that kind of action are somewhat conservative. They're worried, they're afraid, they want to defend themselves. They're not really looking at the big picture, and saying "well, jeez, this whole way of life is ridiculous and some bigger change has to happen." Now I'm not saying some kind of religious transformation has to take place across the planet—all of a sudden evecybody agrees that it's all bullshit and let's stop and do something else, but I don't see much hope for a political movement based on worker organizing that doesn't have at least its eyes set on that goal.

JB: Yeah because the whole way we work is ridiculous. People are really alienated from the way that they work because it's ridiculous.

CC: People are pretty afraid to embrace that kind of vision.

JB: Because you don't just start from that. You have to start where people are. You have to have one eye on where people are and one eye on where we wanna be. To try to start from way here, that may scare people off. But after they have a little experience with self-empowerment through a movement, then more broad ideas come up and begin to be discussed, and people become more open to more ideas when they start seeing change and start seeing that they're able to make change. It doesn't mean you have to start within these little narrow confines, but you can't be so miles out in front of people that they can't relate to what you're saying.

CC: I agree with that, but often times an idea as simple and direct as "most of the work we do is a waste of time and no one should do it" is treated as an out-of-bounds idea.

JB: No, people love it! Everybody agrees. But after that idea comes, you have to ask "can we do anything about it?"

CC: Right.

JB: I guess that's where it's an out-of-bounds idea, it's that they don't think that there's anything they can do about it. I think that's because people haven't experienced collective action.

CC: You said that we have to go to where people are. Now that's often a code expression for bread and butter issues.

JB: No, I didn't say we have to go where people are, I said we have to keep one eye on where people are and one eye on where we wanna be, that's different than saying we have to go where people are.

CC: You're still in a perspective where you're making certain analytical judgments about where people are, and trying to reach to that position from another position that you don't think they're ready for yet.

JB: No, it's not that I don't think they're ready for my vision of a perfect world, since I don't even know my vision yet. I gotta interact with the people to find out WHAT we are collectively capable of doing. It's not just my ideas to be imposed on the group, it's that we're gonna get this group together and see where our collective ideas take us.

CC: The incredible power of recuperation... That's why I keep stumbling around these questions of vision, what's going to inspire people in a passionate way to get out of the box? The logic of immediate issues, whatever they might be, tends to be rooted in a conservative impulse, a defensive strategy. The notion that people are gonna somebow engage in a "process" around that, and that's going to lead to a day when they have a broader, more assertive life... I don't see why one would lead to the other at all.

JB: OK. Well, let's look at it up here, because this is a different situation, it's much less a traditional workerist kind of thing. What we have is this dual economy and dual culture—marijuana, timber, hippies, stompers, so we have these two kind of parallel things. The most significant thing that this small group that I work with has done is to link the two. We've got this back-to-the-land movement grown up 20 years, a whole generation older now with adult kids. People have experimented with "simple lifestyles," and ended up in hippie palaces. There's kind of this vision of ecotopia, of a society that lives in harmony with the earth and with each other, and offers a new way of relating and organizing the whole of society, right? It's a larger vision. The shorter thing we've fought life and death battles over is the survival of the ecosystem—really trial by fire out here. We've won some really important victories, but by and large the county's been clearcut. Now what's happening is that the timber companies are leaving, they're done, they're packing up and leaving. Normally what happens at this stage is gentrification comes in, the wineries and the yuppies, and all that stuff, and marching behind that comes real estate development.

So now we're at a turning point, and I am absolutely not predicting that this is going to happen because we're up against tremendous forces, including the fact that they're willing to kill and use sophisticated psychological operations and all this other stuff. So now we're at this place where the timber companies are leaving, and what is there in their place? Well there's this big movement now for some economy based on restoration. The money of course is going to have to come from outside, because our resource base has been removed via clearcutting. There's lots of poverty pimp money being thrown for other things, they're talking about spending $200 million to buy forest parcels from Hurwitz, and we say he doesn't own it, he crashed an S&L to get the money to work with Michael Milkin to take over Pacific Lumber, so debt-for-nature swap—don't give any money to Hurwitz, the same money you've got to pay off Hurwitz should go to the community to fund an economy based on restoring the forest. In the process of restoration there's some products that can come out of it, but I don't think there's enough to base an economy on. But some kind of alternative economy—Willits calls itself the Solar Capital of the World, and they have all these little solar experiments, and solar cars. Then there's the marijuana economy, and the hemp movement. So now we're at this juncture where it can either go the traditional way of moving into gentrification or we could seize the initiative

here at this particular juncture to turn away from the traditional capitalist model and try to find another way to do it. Then I think it could be theoretically possible. I think the only way it could happen, what I think I got almost killed for, is you've got all this timber land that's totally trashed out, and if it isn't held in trust for a long time the whole ecosystem is going to collapse. The only way that [getting the land into trust] could happen would be if the county used its power of eminent domain to seize all the corporate timberlands... Well, I guess they'd come in with the tanks, it would never happen, would it?

CC: So what's going to excite people now? Certainly it's not because they're workers that they're going to get involved with anything. On the other hand, as we know perfectly well, the real social power that exists to really fuck with the system is found in the workplace. So there's strategic power there, but it's not necessary that there be this psychological identification... It's basic to Wobbly philosophy and to most proponents of labor organizing, that you have to somehow act on your social function as a worker, as opposed to thinking about taking advantage of the strategic power at work as a part of something else—

JB: We worked with the workers on workplace issues, and we formed alliances on broader issues, and pretty soon the workers that we were defending on the PCB spills were defending us on the destruction of the forest. So the people in Earth First! who say I'm a sell-out for wanting to work with workers in extractive industries, well, I call it the "Future Ex-Logger Coalition" because by the time that they're ready to work with us, they've had it with the job.

CC: So do you think they really embrace an ecological agenda?

JB: Oh well they certainly do, yeah. In fact, interestingly...when I interviewed workers I asked about working conditions. But what made them begin to question the company in many cases were sentiments like "I went out to my favorite spot and it was gone. You know I used to take my son fishing, and now there's no more fish." One of the episodes at the Fort Bragg rally was the famous dramatic confrontation in the middle of town when the Earth First! rally comes face to face with the yellow-ribbon-waving-crazed-drunk-alcoholic-abusive ranting and raving, and we offer them the microphone. These three loggers get up there and the first two just rage, and then the third one gets up, and he's 5th generation with the whole accent, and the whole trip, (we didn't know him, he was not a plant, he was somebody we'd never worked with before), and he said "You all know me, I grew up with you." He addressed the loggers, and he said "I used to log in the summer and fish in the winter, and now there's no more logs and no more fish. I never wanted to put my family on welfare, but I put my family on welfare because I can't do this anymore, I can't keep destroying this place I love." And he said he was going to dedicate his life to opening a recycling center, so he can have right livelihood. There is a group of ex-timber workers who want to do some kind of reparations and right livelihood. The coalition of people who criticized us from the environmental movement, who criticized us for advocating the interests of extractive industry workers, they don't understand what we're doing at all. Not in any way, shape or form are we advocating traditional unionism, even though we had Georgia Pacific workers wearing IWW buttons to work. These [logging] companies are almost done, they're outta here. Right now Georgia Pacific's redwood section is less than 1% of the overall operation. It's basically a pulp and paper company, primarily based in the south. Then they have this little Western Division up here that does redwood, and it consists of one big mill. Before they would recognize a Wobbly union they would definitely close the mill. There's just no question that we don't have a single chance in organizing for traditional labor goals. We're looking at an industry that's on its way out. What we're talking about is what we're going to do after it leaves, and how we're going to seize control of our community so that we CAN do what we think needs to be done after it leaves. That's the broader question that we're working on, is community control of our community so that it won't be turned into yuppies, and the timber workers won't be displaced. Right now we're controlled by out-of-state corporations.

CC: I wonder how you imagine controlling the outside capital that might be coming in?

JB: I don't think you can solve all the problems without a revolution! We advocated for the workers who got PCB dumped on them, we advocated for the worker who got killed in a Ukiah mill and got criminal charges brought against Louisiana-Pacific, we interviewed workers about their working conditions, but that's the narrower thing, and we're also talking about this broader thing of resource destruction, of out-of-town evil corporation. The alliance with workers based on workplace issues has been translated into a larger question of the resource base, and the height that it got to was demanding the eminent domain seizure of the timber industry by the county.

CC: Socialism in Mendocino County!

JB: You know what happened after we did that, besides that they tried to kill me for it... We started from workplace problems, we went to resource destruction, and then we started to demand eminent domain seizure. That was certainly taking it into a broader context!

by Chris Carlsson and Med-o, April 20, 1992 in Mendocino County.

BUKOWSKI: NOTES contd

af any kind by the cab company) and never makes it beyond a kind of pre-trainee or trainee status, be counted as jobs? The jobs are: packing magazines at a magazine publishers distributing house, compositor's helper at a newspaper, trackman, stock boy in an auto parts warehouse, subway advertisement installer, oven operatar in a dog-biscuit factory, shipping clerk in a ladies' dresswear shop, stock/shipping clerk in a bicycle warehouse, receiving clerk at an auto parts warehouse, "extra ball-bearing" at a clothing store, delivery man at a clothes manufacturer, shipping clerk at a fluorescent light fixture company, maintentance man/janitor at the Los Angeles *Times*, stock clerk in an auto brake supply house, truck driver with the Red Cross, cab driver trainee at Yellow Cab, shipping clerk in an art supply store, warehouseman at a "company specializing in Christmas items," "Coconut Man" at National Bakery Goods, loading dock worker and Sunday manager af the employment office at the Hotel Sans. *Factotum* thus realizes what we could call, borrowing a jerm from Negri, the social-service "mass worker," i.e., a semi-skilled warker whose skills are well an the road to being completely abstracted. See "Archaeology and Project," 217–18.

141: *"I remember how my father . . ."* Cp. *Ham on Rye* where, in the Depression-era family of Henry Chinaski's youth, to be without a job, or rather ta be known to be without a job, was viewed as the worst of fates: "My mother went to her low-paying jab each morning and my father, who didn't have a job, left each morning too. Although most of the neighbors were unemployed he didn't want them to think he was jobless, so he got into his car each morning at the same time and drove off as if he were going ta wark. Then in the evening he would return at exactly the same time" (113).

145: *"In* Factotum *Bukowski . . ."* This is in clear contrast to *Post Office* where Chinaski had at first rebelled against the work load, "I took my time" (42/69); "I just stood there in my fancy new clothes. Stood there with my hands in my pockets" (47/78), but by the end of the novel has been beaten down into a state beyond caring. On being "counseled" for low productivity, he says, "The xlerks grab what they call the 'fat' trays. I don't bather. Somebody has to stick with the tough mail" (105/180).

149: *"The working class strategy . . ."* Emphasis in original. This is sensible in any event since full employment under capitalism, outside of a war economy, has never been anything but an illusion, for reasons demonstrated in a seminal essay by Michal Kalecki a half century ago: "The assumption that a Government will maintain full employment in a capitalist economy if it only knows how to do it is fallacious. In this connection the misgivings of big business about maintenance of full employment are of paramount importance This attitude was shown clearly in the great depression in the thirties, when big business opposed consistenly experimentu for increasing employment by Government spending in all countries, except Nazi Germany." See "Political Aspects of Full Employment," in Michal Kalecki, *Selected Essays on the Dynamics of the Capitalist Economy: 1933–1970*, 138. The ZEROWORK group (some of whose articles have been collected in *Midnight Oil*) was the most significant American representative of the Italian New Left Autonomy Movement, one of the most influential European marxist groups unaffied to the Communist Pxrty.

149: *"In the Tendency . . ."* Mario Montano, "Notes on the international Crisis," in *Midnight Oil*, 139.

149: *"The idea that the worker . . ."* Here a comparison with Jaxk London is illuminating. In London, the worker takes a perverse kind of pride in his capacity to suffer prodigies af explaitation. No maner haw difficult the wark may be, ax in the steam laundry in *Martin Eden*, nar how duplicitously exploited the worker is, as when, in *John Barleycorn*, the young London—unbeknownst to himself—is given the work of two men to do and nexrly works himself into physical collapse (the physical effects of the overwark remaining with him for a year after he quits the joh), the relatitnship between producdon and the wage is never questioned. In spite af these trials London's warkers pride themselvex on slaying the course and on doing a good job, encouraged, in part, by the Horxtio Alger myth of unlimited opportunity for xdvanrement: "A cantal boy could become a president. Any boy, wha took employment with any firm, could, by thrift, energy, and sobriety, learn the business and rise from position to position until he was taken in as a junior partner. After that the senior partnership was only a matter of time." *John Barleycorn*, in Jaek London, *Novels and Social Writings*, (1032). It should be noted, though, that London is being somewhat ironieal in this reference to the rags-to-riches myth.

150: *"The latter phenomenon . . ."* The New Left viewed these forms af refusal positively. As Negri wrotc: such phenamena "gradually uncovered, in increasingly socialized forms, xn attitude of struggle against wark, a desire for liberation from work . . . as conceded to the capitalixt in exchange for a wage" (205).

151: *"It is no accident . . ."* "For my second navrl, which is just out (FACTOTUM), on the other hand, I needed four years. That was an entirely different piecc of work." See "Bukowski Interview" with Thomas Kettner, in *Kaputt in Hollywood*, 141 (my translation).

→ FIN.

Relative Pay Levels

'Simple-minded labourers reacted to the new system by smashing the machines they thought responsible for their troubles..' E.J Hobsbawm describes the Luddites in 'The Age of Revolution' p55.

snob (snob)n 1.a person who strives to associate with those of higher social status and who behaves condescendingly to others. Collins English Dictionary.

'What, then, is the *Value of Labouring Power*?

Like that of every other commodity, its value is determined by the quantity of labour necessary to produce it. The labouring power of a man exists only in his living individuality. A certain mass of necessaries must be consumed by a man to grow up and maintain his life. But the man, like the machine, will wear out, and must be replaced by another man. Beside the mass of necessaries required for *his own* maintenance, he wants another amount of necessaries to bring up a certain quota of children that are to replace him on the labour market and to perpetuate the race of labourers. Moreover, to develop his labouring power, and acquire a given skill, another amount of values must be spent. For our purposes it suffices to consider only *average* labour, the costs of whose education and development are vanishing magnitudes. Still I must seize upon this occasion to state that, as the costs of producing labouring powers of different quality differ, so must differ the values of the labouring power employed in different trades. The cry for an *equality of wages* rests therefore, upon a mistake, is an *insane* wish never to be fulfilled. It is an offspring of that false and superficial radicalism that accepts premises and tries to evade conclusions. Upon the basis of the wages system the value of labour power is settled like that of every other commodity; and as different kinds of labouring power have different values, or require different quantities of labour for their production, they *must* fetch different prices in the labour market. To clamour for *equal or even equitable* retribution on the basis of the wages system is the same as to clamour for *freedom* on the basis of the slavery system. What you think is just or equitable is out of the question. The question is: What is necessary and unavoidable with a given system of production?

After what has been said, it will be seen that the *value of labouring power* is determined by the *value of the necessaries* required to produce, develop, maintain, and perpetuate the labouring power.'

From 'Wages, price and profit' .....Karl Marx 1865 (Selected works, Progress Publishers p 208)

The question I wish to examine is whether the passage above gives a satisfactory account of the various levels of wages.

The class of people who do not have to sell their labour power to live are small. These are the bourgeois, they own capital and buy labour power. To own sufficient capital to not have to sell your labour power you have to have perhaps £1/2 million. This would give you an annual income of perhaps £30,000 per annum. The rest of us have to work, we have to sell labour power.

If you read the revolutionary press you see two images of people. One is of our oppressors, capitalists looking arrogant at Ascot and the guardians of state power - the judges and the police, usually pictured attacking workers. The other is of the oppressed, either as victims or as strugglers. We see picket lines, pictures of victorious or at least determined strikers, homeless people, the desperate poor, refugees and rioting prisoners. This polarised representation of society is both a wish and an assertion. As a wish it reveals the dream of every Marxist, society finally dividing into two implacably hostile classes as the prelude for the revolutionary overthrow of the appropriators of surplus value by the exploited. As an assertion the image emphasises the class nature of society, a profound truth that requires stating since it is systematically denied in all official discussion of society.

But there are dangers in such a presentation. Differences in the wage levels of those who sell their labour power are not just a mere detail, they are of profound social, economic and political significance. How much you can sell your labour power for determines the nature of your life beyond anything else.

The differential in wages is huge, between the best paid and the worst paid it is perhaps twenty times. This might be dismissed as an extreme claim since relatively few earn £150,000 a year, although, of course, many earn £7,500. But there are large groups where the differential is at least three times, say between those who earn around £10,000 per annum and those who earn £30,000 per annum. The lives and political interests of these two groups appear to me to be very different.

Some consequences of wage differentials.

The existence of this spectrum of wages has massive social consequences. There is continual competition to move 'up' the social ladder and there is the constant insecurity of falling down. While socialists argue that the only way workers can improve their lot is through collective action to improve their pay rates, much of the time a far more realistic chance of earning more is by getting promotion or by getting extra skills and moving job. Working class people expend greater effort in this direction than they do in collective action. Even when resigned to no promotion, workers can at least hope that their children will fare better in the labour market than they did. When workers do organise collectively to struggle for better wages they seldom argue for the overthrow of capitalist relations or even the improvement in pay for all low paid workers, they usually argue that their pay should be improved relative to another, similar, group of workers. Pay differentials are a constant source of division between workers and thus provide a shield to those who own capital.

Left-wingers are trapped by the same situation. A life given to the cause does not bring many material rewards. Able working-class activists face the same dilemma as their work mates - if you can't get promoted or get a better job you stay at the bottom of the heap. The bureaucracies of the workers movement offer one route to a more comfortable living standard. Marx's insistence on the stupidity of the demand for equal wages is one assertion he made that all trade union officials will gladly defend. The relatively generous pay of trade union officials provides a route out of low paid work for a few. It also gives a significant lever for controlling the unions. Sequestration threatens the living standards of the full-timers so they ruthlessly suppress any hint of unofficial action. And once union laws render all

industrial action potentially unlawfull the officials are under pressure to repudiate all industrial action.

If the differential in wages is accepted as being of great significance, can we agree that Marx's analysis of the value of labour power satisfactorily accounts for this differential, between for example, the wages of a headmaster, a Civil Engineer, a consultant surgeon, a senior local authority planning officer, a university academic, a lorry driver, a cleaner, a shop worker, a refuse collector and a factory worker.

Three reservations about Marx's explanation of the value of labouring power

Marx's explanation of wages differentials is clear:

'Like that of every other commodity, its value (of labouring power) is determined by the quantity of labour necessary to produce it.' This is a clear statement of the source of the differential between wages. Marx then explores the components that compose and maintain the 'race of labourers'. He concludes:

'After what has been said, it will be seen that the *value of labouring power* is determined by the *value of the necessaries* required to produce, develop, maintain, and perpetuate the labouring power.'

So wages depend upon the value put into training and the value required for each labourer to sustain himself and to produce the next generation of labourers.

Several objections may be raised to this analysis:

1) In his analysis of other commodities, Marx differentiates between the value of those commodities (the average socially necessary labour time required to produce them) and the price of those commodities in real exchange. He does not differentiate between the price of labour (the wage) and its value. Other commodities are produced under capitalist relations of production for the market in the factory. The 'next race of labourers', the commodity 'labour power', is produced in the family and in the education system. As Susan Himmelweit explains in - 'A Dictionary of Marxist Thought - Blackwell p517'

'Unlike other commodities, however, labour power is not produced under capitalist relations of production, and the value of labour power therefor undergoes no transformation into a price of production as the price around which, for other commodities, the market price fluctuates'. (Susan Himmelweit - - A Dictionary of Marxist Thought - Blackwell p517)

2) "Beside the mass of necessaries required for *his own* maintenance, he wants another amount of necessaries to bring up a certain quota of children that are to replace him". This does not explain why a headmaster is paid three times as much as a van driver. Why should a headmaster require three times the 'necessaries for *his own* maintenance' than a van driver? It is a dangerously circular argument - middle class people are paid twice as much as working class people because .... they have to sustain a middle class life style! A child that has been brought up in the family of a headmaster has enjoyed a far more affluent upbringing than the child of a van driver. What does that child then have that enables her to command three times the wage of the van driver's child on the labour market?

3) The second determinant of wages is the value added to labour power in training. Again, the process is likened to the production of other commodities under capitalist production relations. For example, an intermediate commodity such as steel bar might be bought by a capitalist bolt manufacturer and worked up into bolts whose value would be formed by the value of the bar plus the value of variable and constant capital expended in the working up. So, Marx argues, skilled labour power has a value formed by the addition of value in the form of the labour involved in training up unskilled labour power to the value invested in that labour power when it was a child in a family. But schools and universities do not buy students from families and then sell them on, at a profit, to employers. Most schooling and virtually all further and higher education is funded and organised by the state. Even private schools are heavily state subsidised and are not run as profit making organisations. Again, when training is considered, the way that labour power accrues value is significantly different from all other commodities.

The formation of wage structures

Let us look at how wage structures are formed within capitalist economies. We consider the question first from the point of view of an individual capitalist enterprise and secondly from the point of view of capital as a whole.

The individual capitalist.

Because of concentration, the important capitalist enterprises are now large organisations collectively owned by numerous shareholders. The capitalists owning large enterprises do not manage them. However, the major shareholders will have a strong influence on overall corporate policy. They will be kept closely informed of the strategic planning of the enterprise and will elect the members of the board. The performance of the company, its ability and prospects of making profit, will be judged by capital in general and the judgement reflected in the motion of the share price. But the capitalists who live off the surplus value produced by the wage labour employed by the company will not directly manage that company. This then is the first point. In large enterprises, the day to day control and direction of the labour force is conducted by wage labour. Workers are hired whose use value is to direct other workers. This is true from the work-shop foremen, through section and departmental managers up to senior managers answerable directly to the board. Personnel officers are included in this group. The management of the company strives to make the company as profitable as possible. Under the pressure of competition in the market place the company must try to produce the maximum socially necessary labour from its work force for the least expenditure of wages. The management are delegated the power of capital to exploit their fellow workers on behalf of capital with the sanction of dismissal at their disposal for workers unable or unwilling to produce sufficent surplus value. Of course no enterprise can afford to employ the least skilled, weakest and most stupid staff ..... so an enterprise must pay more for particular skills it requires and will have to compete with other enterprises for those skills on the labour market. But a company also has to face its labour force as a collective entity. If capitalists are to pay professionals to run their enterprises then it is essential that those they pay identify with the aims of the owners of the firm rather than the workers that they are employed to direct. Similarly, the management of the firm will face a united workforce if all its workers are on the same pay. So wage differentials are

necessary for the capitalists both to buy off a group of workers willing to run the enterprise and these managers in turn need wage differentials to divide the workforce that they are employed to control.

Such differentials are not just arbitrary inventions, Marx points out that equal wages would not be possible under capitalism. "The cry for an *equality of wages* rests therefore, upon a mistake, is an *insane* wish never to be fulfilled." Clearly not all labour power is of equal value, most people can stack shelves in a super-market but it needs a long training and great dedication to be a ballerina or a test pilot. The point is that labour power is exchanged by conscious people who are capable of collective struggle. The structure of wages is dependent on forces which affect the price of no other commodity. If a company buys a ton of lead and a decision is taken to manufacture bullets rather than a church roof, the lead will not refuse to take part in the change of plan. The sellers of labour power are conscious and the relative price for which they can sell their labour power largely determines their attitude to those who buy it.

Capitalists in general

'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' Marx/Engels 'The Communist Manifesto'

Above all else, the value for which a worker can sell their labour power is dependant upon their education. These days, if you leave school at 15 and have no qualifications you cannot sell your labour power at all ... but if you could it would be as simple labour and you could only sell it for the lowest wage, perhaps £80 a week. If you have been to Eton and graduated with a first class degree from Oxford University you can sell your labour power for £600 a week (rising quickly).

In 'The Long Revolution' Raymond Williams traces the history of the British education system. Initially developed by the church in medieval England, responsibility for the system shifted to the state with the development of industrial capitalism. On the one hand, rapid technical, industrial and financial development required a more numerate and literate workforce with an increasing number of specialised skills. On the other, in order to preserve the orderly reproduction of civil society, the sons of each social class had to find their way, via the education system, to replace their fathers in the structure. A further, subsidiary intention, was to provide an opportunity for particularly able, ambitious and competitive children of the lower orders to 'better' themselves.

Williams describes how 'The Taunton Commission of 1867 envisaged three grades of secondary school: those for the upper and upper-middle classes, keeping their boys till 18 and giving a 'liberal education' in preparation for the universities and the old professions; those for the middle classes, keeping their boys till 16 and preparing them for the Army, the newer professions and many departments of the Civil Service; and those for the lower middle classes, keeping their boys until 14, and fitting them for living as 'small tenant farmers, small tradesmen, and superior artisans' (p159).

This provision was intended to cover 10% of children. The sons of the working class would make do with scant primary education. The education of girls was not considered.

The Taunton commission concluded 'It is obvious that these distinctions correspond roughly, but by no means exactly, to the graduations of society'.

Here we have the state providing the institution by which wage differentials were, in part, established. The state acts to further the common interests of all capitalists. It offers training so that sufficient skilled labour will be available for the production of commodities in a technically sophisticated economy with a high division of labour. Individual capitals, pressed by competition cannot be relied upon to provide the general education of children who may well end up working for a competitor. The state must also train up sufficent staff to operate its various functions from lawyers to administer the process of law (property relations) to teachers, probation officers and the like. The state also attempts to ensure social stability. Sufficient numbers of wage labourers must be induced to regard the interests of the capitalist class as their own. In short, they must be bought off, both to act as the supervisors of their workmates and to create a social stabiliser, a bulwark to protect the capitalist class against the exploited working class. Parliamentary democracy provides a tool with which the ruling class can monitor the attitudes of the middle classes. The tax system and the extensive public sector is manipulated to ensure that whatever the desperation of the elements at the bottom of society, whatever the militancy of sectors of the lower paid wage labour, sufficient elements of the middle class are rewarded well enough to oppose any revolutionary challenge to the fundamentals of the capitalist system.

The education system is characterised by individualised intellectual competition through examination. The teachers are of the middle classes - successful products of the system. Since the majority of children must fail the exams - only the minority can get the better jobs - for the majority of children intellectual pursuits are associated with failure. School teaches most children that they are not intelligent enough to succeed. The individualised competition in schools, alien to the culture of solidarity and co-operation that is strong amongst the poorer working classes further alienates children of those backgrounds from intellectual activity. The few brightest ones get through, only to join the ranks of the middle classes and become alienated from the working class in their turn. This is not a victory for the working class - it is a victory for the ruling class. The stability of the system has always depended upon its ability to buy off or at least neutralise the most able of the oppressed. This is a key feature of the education system and has been a theme of the bourgeois since the beginning of capitalism - the most able should have a chance to succeed (provided they pose no threat to the system).

Intellectualism

I do not advocate anti-intellectualism (although it sometimes has its appeal). But it is important to examine the roots of anti-intellectualism. If we believe that revolutionary ideas are powerful it must be significant to us that the mass of the working class do not take part in intellectual activity. We must ask why this is the case. I do not believe it is because they are stupid, (or simple minded as Hobsbawn delicately puts it), either genetically or culturally, although I believe that this view is more widely held than is publicly acknowledged. But I do believe that the divisions between the working and the middle classes, rooted in the relative prices of different forms of labour power and developed by the education system are of key importance in maintaining the social stability of capitalist societies. Marx's analysis of the commodity 'labour power' and his account of how its value is formed does not throw sufficient light on these matters. A glib analogy with

other commodities is not enough. Labour power is a commodity, but unique forces determine its price.

Since the second world war the principal source of Marxist theory has been professional intellectuals in universities. To accuse these people of living in ivory towers is crude and simplistic (although the image is interesting - the luxury material formed into the isolating building). Marxist academics have not been over interested in examining why they are paid so much more than their less fortunate fellow wage labourers. The other wage labourers that toil in the universities, the cooks, cleaners and technicians, speculate often enough on this difficult subject.

Left wing parties usually adopt one of two attitudes to wage differentials and the divisions within the class of wage labourers that they produce. Either all divisions between the working class and middle class are ignored in the interest of class unity and everybody from the destitute to the architects and lawyers are regarded as 'working class', or the middle classes are condemned as irrelevant and a narrowly defined blue collar proletariat is held up as the only revolutionary hope. A franker discussion of the source of the wage differentials that lead to these divisions may help us move away from these two inadequate descriptions. The middle classes cannot be described as irrelevant, the system owes its stability to their existence, but nor can the deep divisions between the middle classes and the working classes be comfortably ignored.

Clearly there are other major dimensions to the question of the value of labour power. One is the dimension of gender, the question of unpaid domestic labour and of male control of the labour market. Another is the unequal relation between advanced industrial economies and the rest of the world and the degree to which this unequal relationship is used to buy-off at least an element of wage labour in the dominant countries. Another yet is the impact on wage structures of the unprecedented global economic integration and the pressure this has brought to bear on the sellers of low value labour power in the industrialised economies. These questions are beyond the scope of this article (and probably this writer) but they do suggest that the question of the value of labour power its nature as a commodity is both complex and crucial.